UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

INTIMATELY ALLEGORICAL

The Poetics of Self-Mediation in Stand-Up Comedy

Antti Lindfors

TURUN YLIOPISTON JULKAISUJA – ANNALES UNIVERSITATIS TURKUENSIS
Sarja - ser. B osa - tom. 478 | Humaniora Turku 2019

University of Turku
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Doctoral programme Juno

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The originality of this publication has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

Infographics: Saana ja Olli
Layout: Antti Lindfors

ISBN 978-951-29-7651-5 (PDF)
ISSN 0082-6987 (Print)
ISSN 2343-3191 (Online)

TURUN YLIOPISTO
Humanistinen tiedekunta
Historian, kulttuurin ja taiteiden tutkimuksen laitos
Folkloristiikka
ANTTI LINDFORS: Intimately Allegorical: The Poetics of Self-Mediation in Stand-Up Comedy
Väitöskirja, 120 sivua, 2 liitesivua
Tohtoriohjelma Juno
Toukokuu 2019

Tiivistelmä

Väitöstutkimus käsittelee stand up -komiikkaa suullis-kehollisen lavataiteen ja semioottisen vuorovaikutuksen lajina. Tutkimus keskittyy erityisesti kysymykseen, miten stand up -koomikot esittävät eli välittävät itseään julkisella areenalla, ja miten tätä itsen välitystä tematisoidaan ja haltuunotetaan esityslajissa, jonka kulmakiviä ovat välittömyyden ja läsnäolon ihanteet.

Tutkimus lähestyy tällaista itsevälittymisen poetiikkaa tekstuaalisuuden, refleksiivisyyden ja samastuttavuuden toisiaan täydentävistä näkökulmista. Tekstuaalisuuden käsitteen kautta stand up -rutiineja analysoidaan teksteinä, tai metadiskursiivisina ilmaisullisina yksikköinä, joiden välityksellä stand up -koomikot esittävät itseään yleisöilleen. Refleksiivisyyden käsite suuntaa tutkimusta kohti stand up -komiikan metapragmatiikkaa eli esityksessä ilmenevää metakommunikaatiota ja stand up -komiikan kommunikatiivisia ideologioita. Samastuttavuuden käsitteen kautta stand up -komiikkaa tarkastellaan dynaamisena huomio- ja affektitaloutena, joka perustuu vuorovaikutuksen osapuolten toisteisesti uusinnettuun intersubjektiiviseen yhteyteen.

Tutkimus ammentaa metodologisesti folkloristiikan, lingvistisen antropologian ja kulttuurintutkimuksen oppialoista. Ensiksi, stand up -komiikkaa tarkastellaan folkloristisesti tekstien tuotantona, esittämisenä, sosiaalisena kiertona ja vastaanottona. Toiseksi, tutkimus jakaa lingvistinen antropologian kiinnostuksen refleksiivisyyteen kaiken merkkivälitteisen vuorovaikutuksen keskeisenä aspektina. Kolmanneksi, tutkimus sitoutuu kulttuurintutkimuksen tieteidenväliseen ja kriittiseen eetokseen.

Tutkimus pohjautuu kolmenlaisille aineistokokonaisuuksille. Ensiksi, stand up -komiikkaa lähestytään performanssina suomalaisessa ja tarkkaan ottaen helsinkiläisessä stand up -skenessä suoritetun osallistuvan havainnoinnin kautta. Toiseksi, stand up -komiikkaa lähestytään metadiskurssina hyödyntäen suomalaisilta stand up -koomikoilta koottua kyselyaineistoa (17 kirjallista vastausta). Kolmanneksi, stand up -komiikkaa tarkastellaan kulutustuotteena hyödyntäen suoratoistopalvelu Netflixin vuonna 2017 julkaisemaa 46 stand up -spesiaalia ja muita stand up -tallenteita. Tätä aineistokokonaisuutta täydennetään sekalaisella

stand upia koskevalla kirjallisuudella ja mediateksteillä, kuten julkisilla haastatteluilla, artikkeleilla ja televisiosarjoilla.

Väitöskirjan johdanto esittelee työn metodologiset ja teoreettiset lähtökohdat. Johdanto mallintaa stand up -esityksen affektiivisena koosteena ja samastuttavuuden taloutena, esittelee parallelismin sen keskeisenä poeettisena trooppina ja käsitteellistää koko lajin itsen esittämisen ja äänten animoimisen välillä liikkuvana jatkumona. Tutkimus koostuu neljästä vertaisarvioidusta artikkelista, jotka on julkaistu folkloristiikan, (lingvistisen) antropologian ja etnologian lehdissä. Artikkeleissa stand up -komiikkaa analysoidaan 1) refleksiivisyyden ja osallistumisen, 2) satiirin ja moraalisen vastuullistamisen, 3) parallelismin ja asennoitumisen ilmaisun, sekä 4) kerronnan ja samanaikaisten eleiden toisiaan täydentävistä näkökulmista.

Avainsanat: stand up -komiikka, poetiikka, performanssi, refleksiivisyys, lingvistinen antropologia, affekti, satiiri, kerronta, asennoituminen, eleet

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Doctoral Programme Juno
May 2019

Abstract

The dissertation presents stand-up comedy as a genre of embodied verbal art and semiotic interaction. In particular, the study elaborates on how stand-up comics mediate themselves in a public arena and playfully thematize and reappropriate this self-mediation within a performance form founded on the ideals of immediacy, actuality, and self-presence.

The dissertation attends to such poetics of self-mediation through the lenses of textuality, reflexivity, and relatability. The perspective of textuality orients the research toward stand-up routines as the foremost texts, or metadiscursive units of expression, through which stand-up comics mediate themselves for their audiences' consumption. The perspective of reflexivity orients the research toward the metapragmatics of stand-up comedy, including both metacommunication in performance and the ideologies and valuations (of communication) embedded in the practice of stand-up. The perspective of relatability orients the research toward the dynamics of stand-up as an economy of attention and affect that depends on intersubjective capture between participants of interaction.

The analysis is methodologically informed by the disciplinary formations of folklore studies, linguistic anthropology, and cultural studies. First, folklore studies provides an approach to analyzing stand-up comedy as a genre of textual production, performance, circulation, and reception. Second, the dissertation adopts methodological tools from linguistic anthropology in its shared fascination with mediation and reflexivity in semiotic interaction. Third, the study draws from cultural studies in its broad interdisciplinary and critical ethos.

The analysis is based on a heterogeneous set of source materials. First, stand-up is approached as performance through participant observation in the Finnish comedy scene, primarily in Helsinki. Second, stand-up is approached through metadiscourse, using data primarily accumulated by means of a questionnaire given to Finnish stand-up comics (17 written answers). Third, stand-up is approached as commodity through the analysis of 46 stand-up specials released by Netflix in 2017 and other stand-up recordings available to the author. This data is supplemented by

miscellaneous literary and media texts, such as public interviews, articles, literature, and television series on stand-up.

The introductory synopsis of the thesis outlines the theoretical and methodological fundamentals for studying stand-up comedy as embodied verbal art and semiotic interaction. In particular, it develops an approach to understanding stand-up performance as an "affective arrangement" and an economy of relatability, and as textual production based on the principle of poetic parallelism. Moreover, the introduction provides a heuristic for analyzing stand-up as a continuum between performance of self and animation of voice. The dissertation is comprised of four original articles published in journals loosely representing the fields of folklore studies, (linguistic) anthropology, and ethnology. The specific articles address the following topics in stand-up comedy: 1) reflexivity and participation; 2) satire as a performance of moral accountability; 3) parallelism and stance; and 4) narration and co-temporal gestures.

Keywords: stand-up comedy, poetics, performance, reflexivity, linguistic anthropology, affect, satire, narration, stance, gestures

Acknowledgements

As Gilles Deleuze (1995, 125) famously said it, creation is all about mediators. If one does not belong to a series of mediators, even an imaginary one, one is lost. Writing an anthropological-folkloristic dissertation on the poetics of stand-up comedy, I might add, chances are you get lost anyway.

I have had the good fortune of belonging to a series of benevolent mediators, convoys, and advisers throughout my (at times somewhat solitary) travels in the academia. Upon my graduation, I got to know professor emeritus Pekka Hakamies, who has since looked after my progression with unwavering solidarity and patience. I want to thank Pekka for cultivating a working environment that was conducive to immersive concentration but one in which the occasional stray was not frowned upon either.

The true supervisor of this study, docent Kaarina Koski, has been a tireless critic of my texts, and most importantly, always aimed at bringing out the best in them. Thank you Kaarina for your serious engagement in this project, for initially nudging me toward linguistic anthropology, and for being in general the most supportive supervisor one can hope for.

I would also like to express my gratitude to professor emeritus Seppo Knuuttila, whom I am happy to consider an unofficial third supervisor of this study. Seppo's dissertation on folk humor was one of my bibles when I was starting out, and his intellectually and affectively stimulating writings on cultural studies have had a formative influence on my own thinking. I am proud to follow on the trail laid out by Seppo, and if something of his audacity and brilliance has leaked into the following work, I shall rest content.

I thank professor Anne Heimo for being an encouraging presence since the beginnings of my scholarly efforts, as well as for her fluent co-operation during the very final stages of this work. Anne, I salute you for your broad enthusiasm in terms of cultural research and for currently taking folklore studies at Turku in new directions.

A thousand thanks to the preliminary examiners of this work, associate professor Morten Nielsen and professor Amy Shuman. Thank you Morten for sharing your anthropological expertise in stand-up studies as well as for being such a hospitable

host in Denmark. Thank you Amy Shuman for your deeply thoughtful work in folklore and narrative and for your willingness to act as my honored opponent—I could not be happier about that.

Stand-up comedy is a delicate and intimate endeavor that—from my perspective, as an audience member—rests on both trust and (controlled) affective abandon. I am most grateful that the stand-up comics who have participated in this study have reciprocally trusted me enough to allow me to do this work. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to each and every stand-up comic mentioned on these pages. My respect for your craft keeps only growing.

Like the stand-up comics of this study, I also have been concerned with finding my voice and mediating myself amidst the various social and disciplinary communities of the academia. Having originally accessed the university through Finnish linguistics, then switching over to folklore and comparative religion, it wasn't really until my postgraduate studies that I finally felt like coming home to the theoretical-methodological formation of performance-centered folklore studies and its close intellectual relatives, linguistic anthropology and the American pragmatist tradition. Thank you professor Pertti J. Anttonen for promoting this field in Finland and for organizing with docent Kirsti Salmi-Niklander the workshop 'Performance in the triangle of culture, power and belief' in November 2013, which ultimately clarified my path for myself. Further still, it was at your introductory course where I first learnt that "folklore" bears an inherently political impetus, and thus should not be used lightly. I have cherished that insight since.

The abovementioned workshop was also where I first met my partner in crime Dr. Marianna Keisalo, together with whom we took our first steps toward Finnish stand-up comedy. Marianna, you are one of my favorite researchers, and I am not saying this only because we happen to share an area of interest. Thank you for also inviting me to Denmark for one of the most memorable conferences I have been to. I want to raise my glass for also associate professor Ian Brodie and professor Terry Gunnell for making my life easier in the way of folkloristic stand-up studies—and for Ian and Dr. Katharine Young for further providing public responses for the fourth article included in this dissertation.

A special place is reserved in my mind for the collective of folklore studies at the University of Turku. In addition to Pekka, Kaarina, and Anne, I would like to send my thankyous to the other members of the core group: Pasi Enges, Tuomas Hovi, Kirsi Hänninen, as well as our beloved secretary Anu Raula. I also salute Jukka Vahlo, with whom I was fortunate to share our research seminar, and Anna Hynninen, who has shared both curricular as well as many memorable extracurricular events with me. My very first article on stand-up was written within the confines of the Archives of the Turku University School of Cultural Research (as

the hapless institution was known back then), and for this opportunity I thank Aki Luotonen.

I project warm thoughts and thanks to the second collective in which I have felt both intellectually and emotionally at home, the Helsinki group of folklore studies led by the ever-enchanting professor Lotte Tarkka. Thank you for having me along: Frog, Heidi Haapoja-Mäkelä, Tuukka Karlsson, Karina Lukin, Kirsti Salmi-Niklander, Viliina Silvonen, Eija Stark, Eila Stepanova, Venla Sykäri, and all the rest. Extra greetings to Virva Liski, who is "one of us" at least in spirit if not on paper, and Andreas McKeough, for friendship, hospitality, and vinyl. Ulla Savolainen is also an integral part of this group, but I will thank her a bit later.

My relocation to Helsinki in 2017 endowed me with yet another academic community, the research wing of the Finnish Literature Society. Thank you Secretary General Tuomas M. S. Lehtonen, Ilona Pikkanen, Niina Hämäläinen, Kati Kallio, Sakari Katajamäki and everyone else at the Society for the opportunity to finish my dissertation in the high atmosphere of the House of Nobility as well as to enjoy of your lively research seminars.

During the dissertation process I have worked or assisted in three academic journals, without which my journeys would have been much less eventful. Greetings to the editorial secretary Petja Kauppi and the whole team of *Elore* for keeping up the standards of quality academic publishing. Thank you Rami Mähkä, Päivi Valotie, Tommi Römpötti, and others at *Lähikuva* for steering such an excellent publication and for taking me onboard in 2017. A special thanks to Kaisu Hynnä from the *Lähikuva* team for fellowship in PhD studies and culinary nourishments. Finally, cheers to Wladek Chlopicki, Villy Tsakona, and everyone else at *The European Journal of Humour Research* for providing me with an access to the international and interdisciplinary field of humor studies. It has been fun.

This work has been materially blessed by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the Turku University Foundation, as well as my parents. I would like to express my thanks to each of these institutions, without which this work would simply not exist—literally. I am grateful to the School of History, Culture and the Arts Studies, the doctoral programme Juno at Turku University, and the Turku University Foundation for gracious travel grants, and the latter for also allowing me to stay and write in Villa Tammekann, Tartu, for a brief while during the winter 2016. An article-based dissertation has the added benefit of peer-reviews to guide one's way. A big thank you to this group of anonymous reviewers, as well as to the editorial teams of the *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *Ethnologia Europaea*, *Oral Tradition*, and *Cultural Analysis*. A shout out also to Saana ja Olli for the infographics, and to Olof Olsson for leading me to my epigraph!

At the end, I reserve my most heartfelt gratitude for my partner and fellow scholar Ulla Savolainen. Thank you for sharing your thoughts, passions, and dreams

with me, whether relating to research or reality television, politics or planting. In particular, thank you for pushing me and this work through thick and thin. With you, no hurdle feels too high. Thank you for also introducing me to the two fine young men, Armas and Uljas. With you I am truly blessed.

In reference to the affective saturation with one's work that must be familiar to every writer, I will end with a wise quote from Dan Harmon's *Community*-series: "It's good. You know what, it's better than good—good enough."

Paimion parantola, Finland Proper, April 2019
Antti Lindfors

Table of Contents

If there is something you want to know and cannot discover by meditation, then, my dear, ingenious friend, I advise you to discuss it with the first acquaintance whom you happen to meet.

– Heinrich von Kleist, “On the Gradual Construction of Thought During Speech”

Original Research Articles I–IV

I. Lindfors, Antti 2019. Cultivating Participation and the Varieties of Reflexivity in Stand-Up Comedy. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*. Pre-published May 6 2019.
Available online: https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12223

II. Lindfors, Antti 2017b. Performance of Moral Accountability and the Ethics of Satire in Stand-Up Comedy. *Ethnologia Europaea: Journal of European Ethnology* 47(2): 5–21.
Available online: https://ee.openlibhums.org/article/id/1141/

III. Lindfors, Antti 2017c. Twin Constellations: Parallelism and Stance in Stand-Up Comedy. *Oral Tradition* 31(2): 561–582.
Available online: http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/31ii/lindfors

IV. Lindfors, Antti 2018. Spatiotemporal Management of Stand-Up Performance: Narration and Gestures. *Cultural Analysis: An Interdisciplinary Forum on Folklore and Popular Culture* 16(2): 45–70.
Available online:
https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~culturalanalysis/volume16_2/pdf/Lindfors.pdf

1. Ba Dum Tss

The veritable bible of contemporary streetwise lingo, the *Urban Dictionary* defines the popular sound imitation *ba dum tss* as an "onomatopoeic reference to the drum sound effect heard after a punchline has been told (called a percussive sting). 'ba dum' is the sound of the snare drum and 'tss' the cymbal. It is often used in a sarcastic manner after a cliched or bad joke has been told" (*Urban Dictionary*: ba dum tss). Originally invented by—or at least retrospectively attributed to—the jazz drummer Gene Krupa in the 1960s, *ba dum tss* (also known as the "rimshot") has since become an instantly recognizable comedy trope, encountered in both of its main forms: 1) oral-gestural, where one produces the sound orally while perhaps accompanying the sound with iconic gestures of playing the drums, and 2) the physical-kinetic, when enacted with an actual drum kit. From face-to-face interaction to memes to television series such as *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Family Guy*, and *The Office* (the American version), *ba dum tss* is a morpheme of contemporary transnational folklore, and multiply contagious due to its intermedial and cross-lingual nature. (See Rimshot.)

Figure 1. Gary the Snail playing the *ba dum tss* in *SpongeBob SquarePants*. Screenshot from *YouTube* (see Gary the Snail).

In the terminology of linguistic anthropology from which the present dissertation draws, *ba dum tss* is designated as a metapragmatic index (besides the fact that it iconically resembles its object, the drum sound). Metapragmatic indexes are some of the most important signs: they are signs that reflexively point to the pragmatics of other sign events, whether through presupposition, entailment, or both (Agha 2007a). The index *ba dum tss* is metapragmatic in two respects. First, the utterance *ba dum tss* indirectly indexes one's awareness of the markedly unoriginal quality of one's previous joke or some such humorous utterance (the presupposing aspect) while simultaneously proposing an image of oneself as a self-ironic character who is firmly "in the know" (the entailing aspect). *Ba dum tss* signals that something which was perhaps once humorous (but is currently non-humorous) has been uttered, and in so doing it reflects comedy's preoccupations with the tension between originality and repetition. Second, given the interactional value of *ba dum tss* as a culmination of the first part in a pair in conversational turn-taking, *ba dum tss* metapragmatically indexes the end of a textual sequence while creating an opening for the second of the pair (i.e., laughter) (see Haakana 2012; Sacks et al. 1974). *Ba dum tss* both reframes its antecedent discursive sequence and functions as a pragmatic comic sign in itself. *Ba dum tss* thus constitutes an emblematic index of the ritualized interactional nature of many genres of comedy and folk humor, which generally organize themselves around the formal dyad of *textual units* complemented by co-participant *laughter*.

In addition to its folkloric aspects and its metapragmatic qualities, by "sarcastically" reframing one's "cliched or bad joke," as the *Urban Dictionary* suggests, *ba dum tss* enacts a social dynamic. One of the manifestations of *ba dum tss* is the Rimshot Troll (see Rimshot), which exploits something known as "comic license" in order to provoke the moral boundaries of one's interlocutors. A Rimshot Troll thus represents the tactic of detaching oneself from one's own utterance, the tired viewpoint—expressed by countless public figures after their gaffes and stabs have gone sour—according to which humorous mediation might insulate oneself from social and moral accountability (see Lockyer & Pickering 2005).

In bringing together folkloric performativity with the socially fraught pragmatics and metapragmatics of ironic expression, the comic master trope *ba dum tss* serves as the guiding star for the present dissertation, the broad substantive focus of which is constituted by the performance genre of stand-up comedy. For now, stand-up can be succinctly described as an Anglo-American form of comedy where a solo performer aims at making her co-present audience laugh, primarily through personal narrative. Currently more popular than ever after a history of about 70 years, stand-up can be characterized as one of the main forms of vernacular oratory and verbal art in contemporary Western(-ized) cultures. In the past decades, stand-up comics have taken the Euro-American popular cultural imagination by storm, captured viewers of online streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Comedy Central, and

appropriated the platforms of social media for the dissemination of their craft and/or personal visibility. In the meantime, the genre has been taken up as a viable tradition of live performance the world around, from East Asia to South Africa to Finland, with the latter being the ethnographic milieu of the present effort (see Nesteroff 2015; Double 2014).

Not only does the newly gained popularity render stand-up worthy of attention for both social and cultural scientists alike, it also raises the question of the underpinnings of this performance form for broader social transformations and aesthetic trends affecting the making, dissemination, and reception of contemporary culture and communication. As David P. Marshall (2010, 40–41) observes, "Something has changed in the era of social media and presentational culture," where ordinary people are allowing themselves their lives to be exposed to gain a following and an audience, "and it is worth exploring what appears to be a widening of the public sphere." Stand-up partakes in such sweeping contemporary cultural currents as the convergence of art and commodity forms, collective individualism (itself associated with so-called reflexive modernity in Beck et al. 1994), or the rise of an increasingly intimate public sphere accompanied by an "increasingly exchange-based private one" (see Ngai 2012, 237; Marshall 2010). In this regard, the popularity of stand-up begs for a critical interrogation of this performance form vis-à-vis other cultural practices that similarly turn on playful performance of personae. Such practices include roleplaying and cosplaying (e.g., Rahman et al. 2012), reality television (e.g., Kavka 2008; see also Grobe 2017), gaming (Vahlo 2018), or social media, where we perform our public selves, often through exemplary stories drawn from everyday life (e.g., van Dijck 2013; Shifman 2018). (See also Lindfors 2019.)

This is a study of stand-up comedy as a genre of embodied verbal art and semiotic interaction. This means that it attends to stand-up on the scale of dynamic performance interaction rather than, say, through lenses of popular theater or cultural history (for scaling in research, see Carr & Lempert 2016). Indeed, within the purview of the present study, stand-up is neither theater nor performance art nor storytelling but its own beast—a bit like cartoons are neither literature nor visual arts but their own genre, which perhaps combines aspects of both but is not reducible to either of them. Bestriding the three disciplinary formations already alluded to above—namely, folklore studies, linguistic anthropology, and cultural studies—the dissertation outlines an empirically grounded yet theoretically credible view of stand-up comedy as poetic form in social and cultural context. While the more rounded and (hopefully) more satisfying implications of these tight conceptualizations will be unveiled in what follows, I generally build on the pioneering work of Ian Brodie (2014) in arguing for the utility of ethnographically informed perspectives of folklore studies and linguistic anthropology in addressing stand-up as a form of contemporary vernacular expression.

In particular, this study elaborates on how stand-up comics mediate themselves in the public arena as well as playfully thematize and reappropriate this self-mediation within a performance form founded on ideals of immediacy, actuality, and self-presence. This is something I think is a pertinent concern at a time when our everyday experiences and the means to articulate them have become increasingly mediated through digital technologies. Along these lines, anthropologist Constantine V. Nakassis (2018, 291) has similarly suggested grounding our analytic and conceptual work in critical and reflexive "ethnographies of presence". He encourages attending in ethnographic detail to the semiotic construal of perceptions, affects, and evaluations of *immediacy* or *self-presence* in cultural contexts that are mediated and reflexive to an ever increasing extent (see also Ball 2015). In brutally simplifying terms, this dissertation is about investigating those aspects in the specific context of stand-up comedy.

1.1 Textuality, Reflexivity, Relatability

I attend to the poetics of self-mediation in stand-up through the mutually complementing perspectives of textuality, reflexivity, and relatability. To address these perspectives in that order, the perspective of *textuality* orients the research toward stand-up routines, the foremost textual and metadiscursive units of stand-up discourse. Stand-up routines are conceptualized as the objectified, coherent discursive units of performance, or what are colloquially referred to as the "numbers" or "songs" of stand-up comics (for standard treatments of textuality, see Briggs 1988; Silverstein & Urban 1996; Hanks 1996). Not only are stand-up comics professional speakers and performers, they are also meticulous text-workers, versed in the subtle nuances of communicative form, function, and (laughter-inducing) efficacy of their chosen genre (see also Oring 2016, Chapter 12). While rhetorically stylized in the speech register of seemingly spontaneous conversation through direct second-person address and copious here-and-now deictics, under closer analysis stand-up routines betray abundant indexical evidence of aesthetic form—something of which is also reflected in the rich ethno-metapragmatic vocabulary of stand-up, with its "premises," "call-backs," "act-outs," "set-ups" and "punch lines" (that in themselves might punch "up" or "down" the social strata). Indeed, it has been one of the orienting methodological ideas of this study to follow up on such metadiscursive trails in order to approach what could be called a theoretically informed emic understanding of stand-up. That is, I have often found myself focusing on areas of interest that stand-ups themselves seem to metadiscursively foreground in their craft, either in textual (in speaking of "stand-up routines" and "bits"), interactional and participatory (in phrases like "working the room/crowd/audience"), self-presentational and agential (in elaborating on their "stage personae"), or affective (in

referring to themselves as "high-energy" or "low-energy" comics) terms (see also Lindfors 2019).

As brought into relief throughout the dissertation (and, in particular, in Article III, "Twin Constellations: Parallelism and Stance in Stand-Up Comedy"), stand-up is a *poetic form* with its own intrinsic rules, aesthetic structures, and norms. For analysts of verbal art, stand-up provides a veritable oasis of material, displaying forms of metricalization, poetic juxtaposition, generic incorporation, and elaborate enactment of cross-modal narrative. Like most forms of ritual oratory, stand-up is organized by dominant *parallelism*, an inclusive trope of poetics defined, broadly speaking, as co-textually repeating structures with patterned variation (Glick 2007; Wilce 2017, 81–90; Frog & Tarkka 2018). I advocate for an understanding of parallelism as a flexible analytic tool through which one may approach stand-up as mutually implicating units of discourse, which are typically (or rather ideally) partitioned into sequences by co-present audience laughter.

As for the second keyword—namely, *reflexivity*—it is normative, if not mandatory, for a stand-up comic to explicitly display reflexive awareness toward her ongoing performance, her surroundings, her audience, and her self. It is one thing to say that performances are by definition reflexively attuned, laying stress on the performers' ability to "to see themselves not only as objects of direct contemplation but through the eyes of their audience" (Oring 2016, 200; see also Bauman 1984; Schechner 1985). It is another thing to show in gestural and narrative detail (as I do in Article IV, "Spatiotemporal Management of Stand-Up Performance: Narration and Gestures") how stand-up comics juxtapose and manage various chronotopic frames and orientations with respect to their audiences, themselves, and their material.

Further still, there is something more to the intensity of reflexive awareness in stand-up comedy in that this genre subjects performers to several overlapping modes of evaluation and objectification. Not only are these evaluations and objectifications focused on competence in the performance but also the personality, relatability, sense of humor, individuality, and outer appearance of stand-up comics—and a great deal else, if they are analyzed by an ethnographer. In preemptively attending to and addressing such evaluations, a central trope of stand-up can be defined as the thematization of George Herbert Mead's classic social psychological notion of the "me," that is, the attitudes of others that an individual assumes toward herself (2015/1934; see also Caton 1993).

Besides regularities of communicative form and content, genres comprise metapragmatic knowledge regarding the functions of such forms and contents in contexts of use (Frog 2016, 58). In this sense, the perspective of reflexivity also directs my research on the metapragmatics of stand-up, meaning the ideologies and valuations of communication embedded in stand-up as interactional practice. In

addition to perceivable practice that reveals forms of such semiotic rationality, metapragmatic knowledge can be approximated through metadiscourses surrounding specific genres. In other words, it can be studied by *asking* stand-ups their thoughts on their chosen genre. I have done this through a questionnaire given to Finnish comics, as well as by means of other text artifacts, such as stand-up manuals that assist in drawing the conceptual terrain of this genre. This area of interest can be succinctly described as concerning the question of *how* stand-up is talked about.

In terms of participation structures, stand-up performances are essentially heightened platform events, "in which the speaker stands on a raised platform before an assembled audience, elicits the gaze and participative attention of its members, and delivers an extended, essentially monologic utterance" (Bauman 2016, 32; Goffman 1981, 7; 1983).[1] While fundamentally asymmetric in terms of agency and accountability (or "manipulation and influence"; see Quirk 2015; Peterson 1998), these events take place in pubs, bars, coffeehouses, nightclubs, festival tents, and stadiums, where seats are generally equally expensive, having a potentially levelling effect on the audience. In other words, stand-up is performed in spaces marked by modes of intimacy such as physical co-presence, festivities, and possible inebriation, where "groups will not only share watching the comedy, but discussion, laughter, buying rounds of drinks, comment on performance and the taxi fare home" (Rutter 1997, 72). Such gatherings evoke what Emile Durkheim (1965 [1915]) called collective effervescence, what Victor Turner (1969) aimed at with *communitas* (acknowledgment of human siblinghood), and what Randall Collins (2004, 35) refers to as the condition of heightened intersubjectivity (see also Maffesoli 1996).

As one of the idiosyncrasies of the form, stand-up depends on cultivating structures of participation and identification while simultaneously constraining its participation framework into a narrow range of non-verbal response cries, interjections, and laughter. For stand-up gigs to succeed, as most stand-up comics emphasize, something has to "connect" or resonate between the performer and audience: emergent relations have to take form. I want to suggest that in the context of stand-up, this something can be designated as *relatability*. Such relatability can be furthermore described as moral and affective, yet equally epistemic and cognitive

[1] It is important to note that such heightened forms of public rhetoric are "heightened" precisely in their Euro-American cultural contexts. Consider, for instance, how Jennifer Jackson (2013, xvi) describes Malagasy as a communicative community in which the "microphone is not a contextual marker that frames an event as public at all." In contrast to Malagasy, in Euro-American contexts "there is implicit knowledge that whatever comes through the mic has potentially a public life beyond the event itself, as though the mic serves as a sort of amplification of the self, whole and up for analysis and commentary by others indefinitely" (Jackson 2013, xvii).

in nature. After all, stand-up comics aim to resonate with the audience by evoking an emotional response and by encouraging a modality of engagement that is primarily affective. In this sense, stand-up lives and thrives off what Lauren Berlant (2008) labels "intimate publics" or what Zizi Papacharissi (2015, 311) refers to as "affective publics," "mobilized and connected, identified, and potentially disconnected through expressions of sentiment." Such publics are temporary social collectivities of strangers formed through affect-based solidarity and mutual recognition rather than shared history, ethnicity, gender, or any other markers around which communities have been traditionally perceived as mushrooming (which is not to say that these differentials would not matter, they do).

As I explicate in further detail in Article I, "Cultivating Participation and the Varieties of Reflexivity in Stand-Up Comedy," as well as in Chapter 4 below, relatability is primarily cultivated in stand-up through various forms of metonymic exemplification or typification of personal experience. One of the fundamental dialectics staged by stand-up comedy is located between the particular and the typical, which in stand-up is often articulated with another tensional binary between subjectivity and objectivity (see Højer & Bandak 2015). As such, a central communicative trope deployed by stand-up comics is allegory, defined by Amy Shuman (2005, 73) as enabling narrators "to speak as if from personal experience but always in reference to the purportedly comparable experiences" of one's interlocutors. Allegorical discourse often gives rise to forms that fall within the purview of *exempla* (see Eggins & Slade 1997), a genre of narrative discourse that is generally legitimized and authorized by foregrounding morality over truth and reason over rationality (for the distinction between being "reasonable" rather than being "rational", see Procházka & Blommaert 2019). Finnish stand-up comic Kaisa Pylkkänen contends that is it essential that the *point* conveyed by her material is sincere and that she "stands behind the message of the bit":

> Details of the stories can be amplified/decreased/modified in order to enhance the whole, but as long as I truly think what I say (at least in the subtext), I will recount the bit with pleasure. This is an important question for myself. I will not tell stories behind whose contents I cannot stand, no matter how many laughs they would get. I represent myself and my thoughts onstage, and integrity is more important for myself than a killer extra punchline with which I would disagree.[2]

[2] All citations by Finnish stand-up comics are drawn from the questionnaire introduced in Chapter 2.2., unless otherwise noted.

According to a prevailing ideology of stand-up, it is admissible to stretch the truth or "external authenticity" (corresponding with "states of affairs") but only for the sake of a more profound moral or what could be called "internal authenticity" (see Shifman 2018; Brodie 2014, 24; Frankfurt 2005).

Stand-up comics are perceived as performing "as themselves," meaning that we tend to measure their utterances and (especially) gestures against our sense of what they are "really" like (see also Frith 1996, 214). They *present* as much as they *represent* themselves, beginning with their vocal expressions amplified through a microphone, which by allowing one to speak in a normal voice sustains an understanding of (material) voice as an immediate, natural expression of (interior) self (Brodie 2014, 51–53; Seizer 2011; see also Schäfers 2017, 9). As an education in public presentation of the self, stand-up perpetuates a "politics of voice that thrives on notions of immediacy, transparency, and participation" (Schäfers 2017, 10). Implicated in the combination of my chosen perspectives of textuality, reflexivity, and relatability is thus the fundamental category of *stage personae* in stand-up comedy. In acknowledging the tensional alignment of stand-up comics as token private selves and typified public personae I conceptualize the form as a continuum between *performance of self* on the one hand and *animation of voice* on the other hand.

As expert authorities in the realm of what Walter Benjamin called the "mimetic faculty," stand-up comics are able to enter "into the situation of every other in the cosmos, including every animal, every inanimate object" (Benjamin 2006, 142; and for his classic treatment of the subject, see 1999). In particular, stand-up comics work by staging and juxtaposing representative voices through reported speech, striving to overcome affective indifference by (dramatization of) social difference (Hastings & Manning 2004, 307; Lemon 2004). While exaggerating for pragmatic and aesthetic effect our everyday practice of highlighting identity through contrast and difference, given that the voices animated by stand-ups can also refer to biographically identifiable persons, close relatives, or friends and acquaintances of these performers, a constitutive ethical tension in stand-up concerns the question of who and what comics are perceived as being entitled to voice in their performances, and in what light (see Shuman 2005; Goldstein & Shuman 2012).

It might seem that we are dealing with a genre that abounds in apparent paradoxes and conflations of opposites. Stand-up is both flagrantly individualistic in ethos and interpersonally engaging in practice. It is vernacular and localized, while often striving for cosmopolitan or universal resonance; heavily rehearsed on the one hand yet seemingly off-the-cuff on the other; highly artificial as interaction yet suffused by various ideals of authenticity; and both reflexively detached and

immersively engaged (see Candea et al. 2015; Anderson 2001; Grobe 2017, 35–36).[3] One could easily think of other apparent contradictions as well. However, it is worth raising the question at the outset whether these are merely false dichotomies arising from misconstrued presuppositions informed by largely Western ideologies of language, performance, self, and sociality (see Schechner 1985; Wilce 2009a; Abrahams 2005, 5–6). I attempt to answer this question at least partly in Article II, "Performance of Moral Accountability and the Ethics of Satire in Stand-Up Comedy," where I look at emotional expression and satire in light of stand-up. A brief look at the opposition between vernacular and universal or cosmopolitan resonance will suffice for now.

Richard Bauman describes the vernacular as a communicative modality characterized by "(1) communicative resources and practice that are acquired informally, in communities of practice, rather than by formal instruction; (2) communicative relations that are immediate, grounded in the interaction order and the lifeworld; and (3) horizons of distribution and circulation that are spatially bounded by locality or region." In the same breath, however, Bauman notes that the vernacular modality exists only in dynamic relation to its counterpart, the "cosmopolitan" modality, as opposing vectors in a larger communicative field: "If the vernacular pulls toward the informal, immediate, locally grounded, proximal side of the field, the cosmopolitan pulls toward the rationalized, standardized, mediated, wide-reaching, distal side" (Bauman 2008, 32–33). (See also Howard 2008; for cosmopolitanism, see Rapport 2012.)

Needless to mention, criteria of both modalities apply to chosen instances of stand-up. When the Finnish stand-up comic Ismo Leikola won the "Funniest Person in the World" competition in 2014, for instance, his most digitally viral routine dealt

[3] Similar conflations also fascinated the Israeli author David Grossman in his 2017 International Man Booker prize winning book *A Horse Walked into a Bar* (originally published 2014 in Hebrew), which focuses on a single stand-up gig gone awry. As his primary attraction to the genre, to wit, Grossman names the "contradiction between the detachment and cynicism of the stand-up comedy and the intimacy of the story being told" (Zax 2017). His book figures the genre of stand-up as ambivalently split between 1) autobiographical life story, represented by the confessional affordances of the genre, and 2) the formalized, impersonal or even clichéd stand-up gags and narrative routines bearing little, if any, relevance to the person behind the comic persona (the title of the book itself representing an introductory formula of the second type). Grossman's main protagonist, Dovaleh G, is an established comic who is amply able to work his crowd through tried and tested standards and tropes of the genre but who inexorably, and explosively, delves into the autobiographical, confessional, and seemingly therapeutic modes of discourse. For Dovaleh, stand-up provides a public medium for redeeming himself from his personal past, and Grossman's book is an extended exploration of what many actual comics who have answered my questionnaire find inappropriate or even dangerous: stand-up-performance-turned-therapy-session.

with the then-recent European financial crisis by elaborating on the notion of debt (see Ismo Leikola, Laugh Factory 2014 finals). Whereas the European bank crisis clearly functioned as the cosmopolitan coordinate of his routine, bringing people from a range of different states and nationalities together in a shared framework, Leikola simultaneously dramatized the global event through the grassroots perspective of mimetically enacted reported speech. In particular, he voiced "banks" and "countries" in the mode of intimate, affect-laden conversation, rendering the routine with vernacular, immediate, and experiential resonance ("We have to pay… They sent us a letter."). Adopting Leikola's routine as exemplary in terms of stand-up aesthetics, stand-up could be characterized as an artistically crafty balancing act between the modalities of vernacular and cosmopolitan—perhaps in both denotations of *crafty* as "dexterous skill" and "wily cunning."

Rather than being vernacular or cosmopolitan by definition, I argue that it is characteristic for stand-up to *stage* the tensional dialectics between various communicative modalities and modes of experience—such as vernacular and cosmopolitan, engaged and detached, sincere and ironic, subjective and objective. In doing so, I suggest that stand-up presents the researcher with a productively multifaceted and resistant object against which to calibrate and hone one's theoretical premises and methodological tools. Indeed, as much as being about stand-up itself, I perceive this study as concerning and contributing to a methodological and conceptual debate not only relevant for studying poetics and performance in stand-up but also beyond—in everyday life. Let us next elaborate on such premises and tools within the disciplinary formations that this dissertation is invested in.

1.2 Folklore Studies, Linguistic Anthropology, Cultural Studies

This study sits at the intersection between folklore studies, linguistic anthropology, and cultural studies. In order to explicate my position in the nexus of these disciplinary formations, I will first introduce the relevance of the field for which the dissertation is prepared, namely, folklore studies. Subsequent to that, I will work my way through what could be characterized as folklore studies' American cousin, linguistic anthropology, before ultimately arriving at the historically youngest interdisciplinary relative of these fields, cultural studies.

Folklore studies, or "folkloristics" (as it is succinctly named in Finland, see Harvilahti 2012), concerns itself with the inter- and intragenerational transmission and circulation of (aesthetically marked) texts, representations, beliefs, and practices, or any other patterns of sign behavior deemed more or less emblematic of

cultural, ethnic, national, or other group-related characteristics.[4] As a metacultural label (Urban 2001) for a set of such patterns, "folklore" has gradually been adopted by the broader public since its coinage in 1846 and become a translinguistic vernacular term. This is also the case in the Finnish words *folklore* or *kansanperinne*, which basically translates as "the tradition of the people" (Anttonen 2005; Noyes 2012, 13). The self-serving qualities of the concept are thus apparent in that the recognition, labeling, and promoting of the categories of "folklore" or "tradition" obviously benefit various arbiters in the fields of applied folkloristics and cultural heritage, as well as academic folklorists themselves.

In particular, Dorothy Noyes (2012, 15–16) observes that the sociotemporal location of folklore has shifted from its earlier ideological (and blatantly classist) association with a historical stratum—in the sense of once being perceived as a "residue surviving chiefly in the lowest layers of society"—to the immediate spheres of everyday engagement where actors are understood as drawing from whatever discourses and resources are available to them, whether traditional, professional, alternative, or otherwise. Folklore and its close conceptual relative, *tradition* (see Blank & Howard 2013), are currently understood as dynamic (and at least seemingly autonomous) stages for vernacular modes of expression sprouting from the "interstices of institutions and the new platforms of digital culture." (Noyes 2012, 18–19; Noyes 2016a; Bronner 2017.)[5]

Folklore scholars attend to regularities and patterns in time, to the retention of the past, and to the transmission of forms in the present (Berliner 2013, 72).[6] Characteristically for the perspective of folklore studies, culture is postulated as self-organizing through a repetitive variation of genres of communication (Toelken 1996; Honko 2000; Bauman 2008; Frog et al. 2016). While the label of folklore might give rise to an intuitive sense of a distinct object under scrutiny (e.g., a quantifiable unit, such as a single text), scholars have become increasingly aware during the latter half of the 20th century that what we are dealing with are processes and practices rather

4 In this regard, there is something "more" to folklore than what is implicated by vernacular or ordinary communicative action per se: folklore represents a higher "order of indexicality" (Silverstein 2003) in relation to the latter. That is to say, the texts, practices, and patterns labeled as "folklore" betray an implicit highlighting of meaning-making processes themselves, or "hyper-signification" (Katz & Shifman 2017), often through various modes of formulaicity.

5 The notion of tradition as a "dynamic stage" is borrowed from folklorist Lotte Tarkka (public presentation at the Finnish Literature Society on January 18, 2018).

6 Symptomatic of either disciplinary demarcation, (mis)representation, or plain ignorance, anthropologist David Berliner (2013) lays out an overview of the study of cultural transmission in anthropology without a single mention of folklore studies, the one branch or division of cultural anthropology that has most consistently devoted itself to the study of cultural transmission and reproduction (for a self-critique, however, see Oring 2013).

than stable products or texts (Howard 2008; Oring 2013; Bronner 2016). In fact, the perspective of virtual processes rather than discrete objects can be traced back to Petr Bogatyrev and Roman Jakobson (1982, 38), who already in the 1930s designated the "work of folklore" as being extra-personal, having only a virtual existence. Rather than seeing it as purely virtual, however, I prefer an understanding of folklore as rooted in both virtual and historical encounters. To follow William Mazzarella (2017, 8) regarding what he calls the mimetic archive, folklore might be said to connote "virtual potentialities that at once embed a history of encounters and lie in wait for the future encounters that will actualize them in new forms."

Folklore studies and its cherished category of folklore are underpinned both historically and conceptually by two highly influential concepts of culture that emerged during 19th-century Romanticism: the anthropological concept of culture as collective life forms and the aesthetic concept of culture as artistic creativity, which is also reflected in the discipline's historical positioning between anthropology and literary or art studies (for the genealogy of these concepts, see Fornäs 2017; on the positioning, see McNeil 1988). In other words, folklore studies has been invested in both the anthropological premise that divides humanity into a plurality of cultures and the aesthetic model that is responsible for historically projecting utopian hopes onto the creative arts as the symbol of what Sianne Ngai (2012, 239) calls the "lost utopia of unalienated work." Perhaps ironically, Johan Fornäs (2017, 36–37, 47) notes how "considerable confusion arose when these contrasting senses were mixed, since everyday life forms are not the same as artistic creativity." Fortunately, however, sometimes conceptual tensions or "confusions" of this kind can be also turned into an asset and virtue.

While the anthropological premise of cultures as homogenous and bounded "life forms" has since been abandoned in favor of understanding culture as something like "signifying practices" (see Fornäs 2017, Chapter 5), shadows of the aesthetic model of culture as a specifically marked domain of creativity persistently linger in folklore studies. This premise has been most explicitly articulated within the so-called performance-theoretical folkloristics' focus on performances as aesthetically marked events of entextualization (Bauman 2004; Noyes 2016a, Chapter 5; for a crucial distinction between *performance* as action and *performativity* as a principle of reiterative efficacy, see Lindfors 2017a, 169–171).[7] Folkloristic performance

[7] Simon J. Bronner (2012, 30) explains that "while variations exist in the use of performance, for most American folklorists applying the concept, the important principles are that: folklore is identified as aesthetically marked events (rather than textual items) situated in an observable, specific frame or stage conducive to artistic communication (usually small groups and settings set apart from ordinary life); performers take responsibility for presentation of this artistic material to an audience; performers strategically shape expressions in response to the immediate context and

analysis is dedicated to the study of performances in a cultural context, or how communities mark out an aesthetically motivated class of communication that is emblematically carried out "above and beyond its referential content" (Bauman 1984). Performances are defined by staging and drawing reflexive attention to their own form, function, and efficacy as social acts. In brief, insofar as this dissertation is concerned with closely related issues, it bears the mark of folklore studies in its orientation to stand-up comedy as performed, genred, and aestheticized texts.

The constitutive category of performance also prefigures and legitimates my bridge from folklore studies to my second methodological anchoring ground: linguistic anthropology. By my own reckoning, both folklore studies and linguistic anthropology are essentially three-step processes: they are about studying *discursive and semiotic mediation* through *embodied social practice* in order to pose questions about that most elusive of concepts, *culture* (granted, some linguistically oriented scholars within these fields move in the opposite direction; see also Noyes 2016a, 131). Both fields swear by the popular pairing of "poetics and performance," thereby betraying some of their debts and investments in the broader philosophical current that is American pragmatism (see Hymes 1981; Abrahams 1985; Pressman 1994; Bauman & Briggs 1990; Fleming & Lempert 2014).[8] Although overlaps between the two perspectives are far from few, linguistic anthropologists seem to typically foreground a Jakobsonian-Silversteinian perspective onto poetics as a function of language use where texts index themselves in the process of pursuing performative social action (Jakobson 1960; Silverstein 1984; Fleming & Lempert 2014; Glick 2012; Reyes 2002). In comparison, folklorists tend to understand poetics more broadly as the intersection of the formal (genre, structure, style) and interactional (performance, framing, turn-taking, tellability, entitlement) features of communication (Shuman & Hasan-Rokem 2012, 57; see also Tarkka 2013). In effect, both orientations boil down to seeing form, content, and function as complementary and mutually defining aspects of discursive and semiotic mediation.

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personal motivations, public purposes, and collateral effects; and perceptions of the meaning of the performance may vary with different segments of the audience and performers, and in different times and settings, and those perceptions are valid and discoverable in ethnographic observation."

8 It is not difficult to find evidence of the close relations or tensions between folklore studies and linguistic and cultural anthropology, and these seem especially pronounced in the American context (see Zumwalt 1988; Bronner 1986). Quite a few central figures from these fields have had a foot in each pool, starting with Franz Boas (1858–1942). As a professor of anthropology and president of the American Folklore Society, Boas was heavily engaged with folklore as both material and perspective on culture, although nowadays he is primarily known as the "Father of American Anthropology" (McNeil 1988).

Linguistic anthropologists are ethnographers of the indexical mediation of social life through linguistic and semiotic communication. Let me quote Jennifer Jackson's (2013, xxiii–xxv) holistic evocation of the perspective of this discipline, which she portrays as invested in the dialectic between "the everyday and the over-the-long-term":

> The patterns are what is key. Each choice in word, tone, prosody, order, the way someone might recall or reenact a story, hearkens to those patterns. These are ways of doing things that are shared among communities of speakers, point to something beyond the speech act itself, and they generally sit just below the threshold of awareness. […] Syntax no longer means just word order in a sentence but an index of social discrimination. Phonemes are no longer minimal units of sound but sound patterns that point to a river or mountain that creates just enough physical distance between speakers to account for an accent or dialect difference. And out of this difference grows evaluations about who says what and how. Each of these individual moments in the everyday reflects these patterns while also tugging on them just a bit, sometimes a lot, to the extent that either they reinforce situations and the social roles in them, or they change. […] It is a constant trip between the everyday and the over-the-long-term, from the individual speech to the institutionalization of, say, class hierarchies, the reproduction of some standard of speaking across multiple contexts over time—in other words what happens right here and now with some larger issue or institution out there we might otherwise think of as a black box, a "they," the work of some invisible hand. […] Doing things this way, that is, reading social phenomena as founded in practice and ideologies about those practices and the people who do them, allows us not only to describe what is going on across a broader scale of social life, but to show to what end and what is at stake that things are the way they are.

In addition to theorizing the reciprocally mediating relations between social life and the minutiae of communicative practice, the salient category of indexicality has provided linguistic anthropologists with a powerful tool with which to probe textuality itself, to unveil the poetic in the everyday.[9] Nakassis (2018, 282) describes indexicality, as well as "the various and far-reaching implications entailed therein," as the fundamental basis of linguistic anthropological analysis and theory today.

[9] In brief, the semiotic principle of indexicality refers to actual causal determination in context: "An indexical ground is not a function of a conventional rule or habit (what Peirce called a Thirdness, as a symbol is) or of shared qualities (a Firstness, as an icon is), but by the actuality (or Secondness) of the relation between some existents in time and space (or at least, the presumption thereof)" (Nakassis 2018, 282).

In related terms, Paul Kockelman (2014, 604) has identified 14 "core moves"—or rather general orientations—recurrently adopted in the field, of which I would like to emphasize the five that have most profoundly informed my own thinking:

> c) Implicit signs as much as explicit signs, and their effectiveness on context as much as their appropriateness in context
> d) Meta-language as much as language, and reflexive language as much as reflective language
> e) Poetic regimentation (showing equivalence), as much as metalinguistic regimentation (stating it)
> […]
> h) Tropic usage (etiolation, parasites, refootings, decenterings, etc.) as much as conventional usage
> […]
> j) Processes precipitating "text" and "context" as much as text in relation to context

In a nutshell, in attending to implicitly efficacious meta-language (c and d), poetic equivalence (e), and tropic language use (h), and through entextualization as well as contextualization (j), I have been concerned with *reflexivity* as signaled in discourse and performance; this is something that I have found most convincingly investigated in linguistic anthropology. If I had to succinctly explicate my debts to this field, I would say that I have learned through linguistic anthropology to pay careful attention to reflexivity as a pervasive aspect of all communication (for an excellent overview, see Agha 2007a, Chapter 1; for other classic treatments on reflexivity, see Lucy 1993; Silverstein 1976).

Ultimately, I would also align this study with the interdisciplinary formation of cultural studies. Having advanced both popular culture and aesthetics of the everyday as serious objects of academic research, cultural studies has taught me to dismantle hierarchical dichotomies—such as high and low, inside and outside, materiality and meaning, traditional and modern—and to treat both poles as "equally revealing of the social conditions in which they are produced" (Illouz 2008, 13). Needless to say, the critical emphasis in cultural studies on intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, and age within a pervasive nexus of power and knowledge is also acute in terms of comedy (see, e.g., Wagg 1998; Lockyer & Pickering 2005; Webber 2013; Berlant & Ngai 2017).[10]

In a convergent fashion as folklore studies and linguistic anthropology, cultural studies has been described as radically contextualist. It is thus concerned with

[10] Besides the special issue on comedy in *Critical Inquiry* (Volume 43, Issue 2, Winter 2017), see also "The Ontology of the Rape Joke" in *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* (Volume 18, Issue 4, 2017).

situational *articulations* and emergent relations between subjectivities, forms, and contexts: for instance, with how personal experiences are articulated with shared forms in specific situations (Grossberg 1992). In also treating scientific and analytic practice itself as a contextually situated and fundamentally invested form of knowledge production, cultural studies has managed to distinctively combine what Melissa Gregg (2006, 6) refers to as "affective address and critical rigour."

I also draw from the ethos of cultural studies in promoting interdisciplinary dialogue and heterogeneous theory formation. While we should acknowledge the risks and shortcomings of interdisciplinary collaboration within an increasingly market-oriented academic environment (see Bendix, Bizer & Noyes 2017), I believe it is generally productive to problematize the institutional barriers that, more often than not, prevent rather than support the spreading of ideas (Gregg 2006, 8). Besides folkloristic and (linguistic) anthropological traditions, I have also borrowed freely from such established fields as semiotics, humor studies, gesture studies, and cognitive studies. In doing so, I have aimed to promote the inclusion of new allies in the collective effort known as cultural studies, whose genealogy includes literary and critical theory, sociology, philosophy, feminist and gender studies, and science and technology studies.

Conceptualized broadly as the study of vernacular modes of expression, folklore studies has provided the present dissertation with an approach to stand-up comedy as a genre of textual production, performance, circulation, and reception. Second, the study is strongly informed by linguistic anthropology in its shared fascination with mediation and reflexivity in semiotic interaction—fascination that is very much shared by the cultural practice of stand-up comedy itself. Third, the study adopts its critically heterogeneous interdisciplinary ethos from cultural studies. I count as shared by all three disciplinary formations the emphasis on processes rather than products, as well as the related emphasis on mediating relations, or "relations between relations" (see Kockelman 2013, 12), rather than discrete objects. Indeed, "relations between relations" can be said to also serve as the guiding abstract model for the present study, the "pattern that connects" (Bateson 1979) its various aspects.

1.3 Relations Between Relations: The Poetics of Self-Mediation

> These performances, when they arrive—in the form of poetry readings, performance art, "confession booth" monologues, etc. — may look like some of the simplest performances we have: one person, typically placed in an everyday space or against a neutral background, speaks directly to the audience. But, studied closely, these performances are not immediate; in fact, they betray an obsession with their own mediation. Confessional performers don't just

> chronicle the events of their lives; they also dramatize the tension between their inchoate selves and the media they use to try to capture them. (Grobe 2017, 23)

In effect, performances and rituals implicate the staging of virtual realities and possible worlds (Handelman 1990; see also Langer 1953). Much of what folklorists, anthropologists, and students of performance have analyzed as the specifically reflexive affordances of rituals and performances derive from such staging (classically, see Turner 1969; Bauman 1984; Schechner 1985). In building virtual realities and possible worlds through which to inform, edify, *and* delight (Sicart 2015; see Turner 1986, 73), performances provoke a change in our cognitive and emotional state, engaging us in potentially transformative "framed behavior" (Beeman 2007). By affording a framed, dynamic mode of action for negotiating experiences and meanings, performances and rituals function as some of the most important cultural media of social and ethical inquiry and reproduction.

Critical, then, are the mediations and relations between the frames of such virtual realities and the frames of what we take to be our here-and-now "everyday realities," for such mediations also lay the ground for interactional participant structures that further determine the evidentiary value of a text or performance "along lines of verisimilitude and fantasy, its appeals to/for identification with characters denoted and implied, and hence its overall evocation of a fictive universe locatable with respect to its audience's" (Silverstein 1993, 35). This chapter is dedicated to the semiotically informed conceptualization of such relations in terms of stand-up comedy as a seemingly unmediated performance form—that is, as a genre built on apparent denial of such framing. It elaborates on the relations between 1) the *stand-up comic and her routines*, on the one hand, and 2) the *stand-up comic and her audience*, on the other hand, while simultaneously pointing toward 3) *the relation between these two relations*. I aim at a sufficiently abstract perspective on stand-up as embodied performance and semiotic interaction that (in retrospect) has informed the four research articles included in this dissertation. Specifically, the following discussion builds directly on Article I, where I outline the three modes of interactional footing through which stand-up comics figure themselves vis-à-vis audiences 1) as token selves, 2) as co-present interlocutors, and 3) as typified public personae.

To reinvoke the foundational category of linguistic anthropology, I suggest that the perspective of *indexical mediation* enables us to productively model and address the relations between stand-ups and their routines and audiences in analytical detail. After all, indexicality is traditionally defined as a "real connection" (such as causality, co-presence, or contiguity) between token representation and its object (Nakassis 2018, 281–282). Translated into the realm of stand-up comedy, stand-up as seemingly unmediated performance form is (ideally) characterized by "real

connections" between the stand-up comic, her routines, and her audience. While the former relationship (between the comic and routines) is perceived in terms of authentic *self-presence*—the comic's routines referencing or deriving from her "real" self, in that stand-ups "play themselves"—the latter relationship (between the comic and audience) is perceived through the *immediacy* of being together in place and time by way of direct interaction.

However, while blatantly marked by such ideals—famously designated by Derrida (1976; see also Nakassis 2018, 286) as metaphysics of presence and desire for immediacy—stand-up also trades on their playful and poetic reappropriation. Indeed, the main argument I advance throughout this dissertation is that a fundamental trope of the genre is constituted by playful thematization, staging, and reappropriation of such ideals and mediations. Rather than aiming at simple erasure or transparency of mediating relations, I argue that stand-up comedy trades on playful manipulation and reappropriation of these relations and the "social and intersubjective truths" (to quote Kavka 2008, 5) that arise out of such playful reappropriation. In short, this is what is referred to as *poetics of self-mediation* in the present study.

This poetics is afforded by what Nakassis (2018) describes as a foundational ambivalence in indexicality between 1) immediacy and presence on the one hand and 2) mediation and representation on the other. No matter how "real" the connections between the stand-up comic and her routines, or between a performer and her co-present audience, my chosen combination of indexical *mediation* implies that we are also dealing with simultaneous mediation. In semiotic terms, because "the pragmatics of indexical signs are indeterminate out of context, they depend on some reflexive framework, or metapragmatics (or ideology, indexical order, etc.) to 'fix' their otherwise shifty values" (Nakassis 2018, 297). That is, every index that supposedly gives or points us to its immediate object—the 'I' of the stand-up comic, the 'you' of her audience, the 'here' of her surroundings, the 'now' of the present moment, or even a pointing gesture of the stand-up comic that directs the attention of audience members to an object (whether physically co-present or imaginary)—is contextually regimented (i.e., mediated) by arrays of other signs that "in their indexical co-relatedness […] reflexively frame and determine the value/reference of such an indexical sign" (Nakassis 2018, 289). Again, translated for the discursive domain under study, the indexes just mentioned are regimented and mediated by what is here termed the metapragmatics of stand-up comedy. To take an obvious example, such metapragmatic knowledge designates whether the 'I' uttered by the stand-up comic is indeed evaluated as implying the authentic self-presence of a performer—or not (in which case this 'I' might be understood rhetorically, for instance).

Let us further elaborate on the tripartite relational and mediational dynamic between the stand-up, her routines, and her audience by designating these nodes as being in mutually mediating relation with each other. That is, each node in the dynamic is both mediating and mediated by others, so that 1) the stand-up comic mediates the audience's relation to her routines (what is said is interpreted with an eye toward who said it), and 2) routines mediate the audience's relation to the comic (what is said determines whether the audience accepts the comic), while 3) the audience mediates the relation of the comic with her routines (what is said is determined by whom it is said to). Further still, we might designate the relation between the comic and her routines as the *vector of representation* and the relation between the comic and her audience as the *vector of presentation*.[11] In short, stand-up necessitates the dual management of both presentation (audience interaction) and representation (routines or material). This is something I deal with in more detail in Articles III and IV (see also Walsh 2011, 82).

To push the analytic matrix further, the vectors of representation and presentation parallel or correspond with each other in performance. In plain terms, *in thematizing aspects of oneself through discourse (representation), the stand-up comic inevitably thematizes the unfolding relationship with her audience (presentation)*, whether in symmetrical or contrasting terms (for such acts of "joint-attention," see Kockelman 2005, 237, 253; 2013, 48).[12] As I have shown in Articles I, III, and IV, in personal experience narratives (the emblematic narrative mode of stand-up comedy), such correspondence or parallelism between discursive representation and interactive presentation is construed between a comic-as-character engaging with other characters in the narrated storyworld and a comic-as-performer engaging with an audience in the here and now (for such cross-chronotopic efficacy, see Silverstein 1993; Parmentier 1997; Wortham 2001, 152; see also Urban 1985; 1986). In precise semiotic terms, such a relation between two sets of signs is named diagrammatic iconicity or formal resemblance: "it is not that

[11] My preferred notions of "presentation" and "representation" correspond with Roman Jakobson's (1990a; 1990b) concepts of speech event and narrated event, which have since appeared in many forms in subsequent research. For instance, Richard Bauman (1986) adopts this distinction by speaking of narrative events and narrated events, while Asif Agha (2007a) prefers the notions of interactional text and denotational text (borrowing them from Silverstein 1993).

[12] In corresponding (though not exactly identical) terms, sociolinguist John Du Bois (2007, 139, 143, 169) has developed a unified framework of stance in what he terms a "stance triangle." According to Du Bois, in taking stances 1) we position ourselves, 2) (dis)align with other subjects, and 3) assign value to objects of interest by invoking presupposed systems of sociocultural value (see also Article III). Importantly, he also notes a parallelism between the relation of the one taking stances (the subject) with her object and the relation between other subjects (addressees) with the same object, which he designates as potentially inviting analogical inferences (Du Bois 2007, 170).

a sign has a quality in common with its object [i.e., iconically resembles it]; it is that the *relation* between signs has a quality in common with the *relation* between objects" (Kockelman 2016, 314; italics added). Diagrammatic icons are thus signs that represent relations among parts of some object by analogous relations between components of the sign vehicle (Parmentier 2016, 22).

To summarize through the following diagram, stand-up performances are constituted and organized by parallelism (itself a form of diagrammatic iconicity) between the vectors of representation and presentation, where the vector of representation concerns the relation between the stand-up comic and her routines and the vector of presentation concerns the relation between the stand-up comic and the audience:

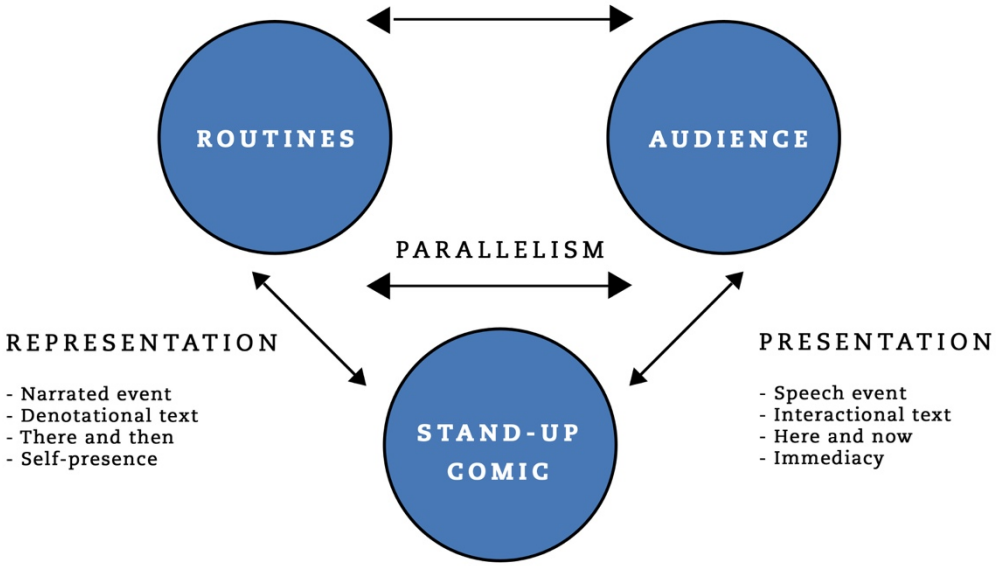

Figure 2. The tripartite relational and mediational dynamic of stand-up comedy. (Design by Saana ja Olli.)

If confessional monologists—and I include a slice of stand-up within this category—do indeed obsess over their own mediation, as performance scholar Christopher Grobe posits in the epigraph to this chapter, I suggest that in stand-up comedy it is over the relational and mediational dynamic between presentation and representation. The above diagram also enables us to preliminarily sketch out the invariant constraints within which such obsession might manifest itself (see also Guillory 2010, 359–360). In other words, reflexive thematization and a reappropriation of mediation in stand-up can be said to lay emphasis alternatively on

the nodes of the stand-up comic, her routines, or the audience, as well as the relations between these nodes.[13] Stand-up comics might thematize the relation between themselves and their routines by highlighting the tensional alignment of their onstage personae with their offstage identities, or thematize the relation with their audience by commenting on the reception of their routines. It may also be argued that they thematize their chosen media of verbal and non-verbal communication through puns, wordplay, and metalinguistic elaboration. Then again, shifts between frames of presentation and representation are classic cases of figure-ground reversal that abound in genres of humor and comedy, from jokes to stand-up (Coulson 2001; Giora 2003; Keisalo 2018a).

As illustrated further in Article III, as a domain of semiotic interaction, stand-up comedy lays particular emphasis on the notions of correspondence, analogy, parallelism, isomorphism, and juxtaposition—in other words on the perception and recognition of formal resemblance and contrast. As much as humor has been classically defined as a perception of incongruity (Raskin 1985; Attardo 1994; 2017), it seems to me to be just as much about perception of analogy, or what Henri Bergson (1935) approached as the "reciprocity of patterns." In order for A to be dissimilar (incongruous) from B, after all, this A has to be *at least* comparable with B on some scale or another; they have to share at least one logical category that they both instantiate, manifest, or exemplify. In this regard, it would not be incorrect to read this dissertation as an extended argument in favor of complementing the theory of incongruity in humor studies by an equally developed theory of analogy.[14]

Coincidentally, this model also organizes the following discussion. In particular, I focus on vector of presentation in general and the affect of immediacy in particular in the chapter "Attention and Affect," and on the vector of representation in general and the ideal of self-presence in particular in the chapter "Trajectory of Becoming-

[13] My diagram is in many respects convergent with (as well as inspired by) Roman Jakobson's (1960; see also Kockelman 2013, 407) classic model in which communicative events are seen as differentially foregrounding the nodes of sender (emotive function), channel (phatic function), referent (referential function), code (metalinguistic function), message itself (poetic function), and addressee (conative or directive function).

[14] My position on this matter is in part informed by cognitive and psycholinguistic research in which analogy and metaphor have been revealed and lauded as equally fundamental to our cognitive functioning as the principle of difference (Itkonen 2005; Fauconnier & Turner 2002; Lotman 1990, 45). I am also reminded here of how certain Saussurean-inspired approaches in social and cultural studies have been criticized for their one-sided emphasis on *difference*—in particular, post-structuralists come to mind as prime targets of such a critique. It could be argued for Saussure's benefit, however, that in highlighting linguistic structure he also understood how the relation between a word and a concept "must be analyzed in relation to the relations between other linguistic forms and their meanings" (Kockelman 2013, 12–13), that is, analogically.

Character." The final major chapter, "Scales of Form," broadly concerns the node of stand-up routines.

1.4 Chapters

The current introduction constitutes a recapitulation of a research project that has metamorphosed as it has gradually progressed. My decision to partition the introduction into two main parts (Chapters 4 and 5, respectively)—prefaced by outlines of the data, context, and method, and followed by a synopsis of the research articles in Chapter 6—reflects my dual orientation toward stand-up as both an effective form and compelling performance (Abrahams 2005, 22–24). I have decided to start from the affective dynamics of performance itself (Chapter 4), the primordial event of stand-up comedy, out of which all perceivable forms—such as texts—emerge (Chapter 5). The work is theory-driven and, as noted above, its central contribution is as much methodological and conceptual as it is empirical. Nevertheless, I have also made certain to ground the analysis in ethnographic realities and concrete examples.

Chapter 2 introduces the various data used in this study and, in particular, the methods for obtaining and organizing this data with an eye on my research aims. First, I detail the fieldwork or participant observation carried out in the Finnish stand-up scene from 2013 onwards, which has provided me with my sense of stand-up as performance. Second, I introduce the questionnaire that I conducted with Finnish stand-up comics, treated in what follows as a metadiscursive regimentation of stand-up. Third, I outline the commercial stand-up that was gathered and analyzed for this study. In particular, I elaborate on Netflix stand-up specials released during 2017 as a delimited collection of up-to-date examples of stand-up reflecting the general market. The chapter also includes a discussion of earlier research on stand-up.

While scaling down to view stand-up as embodied performance and semiotic interaction (rather than scaling up to the genealogy of stand-up in Finland, for example), this study begins from the premise that text and context are not semiotic isolates but mutually mediated and implicating phenomena, understood in isolation only on the analyst's tableau (see Carr & Lempert 2015). In other words, trained as I am in the contextualist realms of folklore studies, linguistic anthropology, and cultural studies, I provide a brief historical and cultural framing of stand-up comedy in Chapter 3, "The Roots and Fruits of Stand-Up." Here I zero in on some of the moments when stand-up comedy took shape as a Western performance genre of apparent immediacy. The chapter also looks at the Finnish stand-up scene, albeit by providing an illustration of some emergent strands rather than a comprehensive overview.

Chapter 4, "Economy of Relatability," attends in detail to the affect of immediacy in stand-up through its participation structures and performance dynamics. Besides immediacy, the chapter elaborates on the notions of individuality and self-presence in stand-up. I present a model of stand-up as a continuum between *performance of self* on one hand and *animation of voice* on the other, where the trajectory from performance of self toward animation of voice corresponds with a movement toward more mediated and potentially more objectified modes of self-presentation.

The penultimate Chapter 5, "Scales of Form," is dedicated to the textuality and poetics of stand-up routines. By starting from the premise that different forms of discursive practice offer themselves up for re-entextualizion and social circulation to varying degrees (where standardized jokes and one-liners might be said to represent the most viral end of the continuum), stand-up is argued as both scaffolding and resisting such re-entextualization. Analysis then moves on to the poetic trope of parallelism as a pervasive pattern of emergent entextualization in stand-up.

Finally, "Research Articles" summarizes the four articles of which the dissertation is comprised, published in journals representing a motley assortment of mutually related disciplinary formations and approaches: folklore studies, ethnology, linguistic anthropology, and cultural studies.

2. Data—Methodology:Field—Work

Individual ethnographies and other products of academic research such as dissertations figure their objects in singular, contingent constellations. The relation between ethnography and its target object is mediated by methodology that orients and directs the process of delineating forms of social activity and genres of expressive transaction into a "field" (Bronner 2013, 191) which can be further documented as research data.

This chapter provides an exposition and critical evaluation of the constitution of my own data. In the main, this data consists of three pools of material, each of them affording a distinct perspective on stand-up, ranging from face-to-face interaction to large-scale mass-mediated modes of semiosis. First, the dissertation builds on ethnographic participant observation at stand-up gigs, which provided me a view of the genre as performance *in situ*. Second, I conducted a written questionnaire with Finnish stand-up comics, which enabled me to attend to the metadiscursive regimentation of stand-up in the particular cultural context of Finland. Third, the analysis makes use of commercial stand-up recordings and other media texts as representing stand-up in its technologically mediated forms and as commodity.

Given the amorphous and transnational nature of stand-up comedy—or indeed of comedy in "art, literature, and life" (Heller 2005)—such a heterogeneous constitution of research material can be both an asset and a hindrance. Insofar as my aim has been to unveil something of the general poetics of self-mediation in stand-up comedy as embodied verbal art and semiotic interaction, the opportunity to look at the genre from diverse perspectives can be argued as enriching rather than flattening analysis. Indeed, such poetics might even be hypothesized as enabling to some degree the malleable, transnational character of this performance form.

2.1 Participant Observation: Genre as Performance

As an evolving cultural phenomenon and domain where immediate first-hand experience of live performance is characteristically valued over more mediated forms, such as YouTube videos or commercial recordings (at least it seems less popular to argue for the opposite), stand-up has to be seized in the moment and

followed on a regular basis. In this regard, the bulk of what can be characterized as my grasp of live stand-up comedy has been formed by following stand-up and attending stand-up gigs in Finland. Since 2013, when I recorded material for what became my first articles on the subject (Lindfors 2015; 2016; these are not included in the dissertation), I have attended stand-up gigs in Helsinki on a regular basis, and to a lesser degree in Turku. As the Finnish stand-up scene is most active in the capital city of Helsinki (at least in terms of the number of comics and comedy clubs), the decision to focus on these locations has also been practical, given that they happen to represent my two hometowns.

At an early point in the research process, I became aware of the fact that attempting to record as many stand-up gigs as possible would not be as productive as I had at first thought. For one, the productive value and import of preparing and implementing recordings with regard to analysis was not ideal; secondly, I realized, the recordings would take too much space. This insight had the consequence that I quickly switched to notetaking as part of my fieldwork methods, scribbling down memorable moments or details of the performance event on my phone, while recording gigs less frequently. In this regard, I would characterize the percentage of recordings I used as excellent; while I may only possess a handful of field recordings, I have availed myself of most of them.

In terms of my domestic participant observation, I have been drawn toward smaller (open mic) stand-up clubs rather than large-scale gigs or stand-up festivals.[15] For one, smaller clubs represent a major portion of stand-up venues. In Helsinki alone it is possible to see live stand-up many times a week, and many of these occasions are relatively low-threshold open mic clubs.[16] More importantly, open mic clubs could be also argued as catering to the most versatile stand-up comics around,

[15] Indeed, the standardized term "participant observation" is a particularly apt characterization for fieldwork done on performance events that presuppose a level of engagement, such as stand-up. As Dorothy Noyes (2003) has observed, cultural events permit observers to a varying degree, and there exist in all cultures genres of events where all who are present must also be participants. However, some scholars have also detected a strong disciplinary suspicion against sensuous participation and mimetic engagement as viable methodological tools within both folklore studies and anthropology (see Taussig 1993; Mazzarella 2017; also Descola 2005, 67).

[16] Although I have aimed to attend live stand-up whenever and wherever possible, my favorite stand-up clubs have been Kallio Komedibolaget, a monthly club at Bar Lepakkomies in Helsinki; Stand Up Ølhus, a bimonthly open mic club in Helsinki that shut down in 2018; Stand up -sirkus; Feminist Comedy Night, hosted by James Lórien MacDonald (also known as Jamie MacDonald, although not to be confused with the Glaswegian stand-up comic by the same name); Paukutusklubi, originally founded by Jukko Lindström, Teemu Vesterinen, Joni Koivuniemi, and Anders Helenius (collectively known as Paukutusjengi); and Kekkosklubi, hosted by the monologist/stand-up Juuso Kekkonen.

at least with regard to the amount of rehearsal afforded for the presented material. Commonly perceived as the foremost venues for would-be comics to give a go at the genre, open mic clubs generally provide stand-up comics with an important space and opportunity for testing new material in sets ranging from a few minutes to slightly longer 15–20-minute sets. In addition to allowing novice stand-ups and often explicitly disclaimed (Bauman 1984) works in progress, open mic clubs often include as headliners at least one or two established comics with more fine-tuned or "safe" material (see also Keisalo 2018a, 120–121). Finally, it has been economically viable to follow stand-up of the open mic variety, as entrance to most of these clubs generally costs only 5–10 euros and some of them are free.[17]

By adopting as an example the process that eventually led to Article III, "Performance of Moral Accountability and the Ethics of Satire in Stand-Up Comedy," my method of investigation could be characterized as follows. First, the research process has typically begun with an incipient idea for a potentially interesting object of study (whether theoretically, thematically, or analytically oriented). In this case, I began with a sense that earlier research on satire has downplayed aspects of moral accountability in favor of satire as social critique, and that stand-up comedy could offer an interesting context by means of which to look anew at these aspects. Second, I subsequently outlined the orienting questions with an eye toward this idea: How does satire function in stand-up interaction? Does it have some particular features in this context? How do stand-up comics construe and figure the targets of their satire in verbal and gestural detail? Third, I returned to the field with a new framework of investigation; this is to say, I considered the field and material with a fresh viewpoint. By dialectically fine-tuning my research questions while keeping an eye on potentially informative material, I finally settled on representative or otherwise productive materials—in this case, routines by Trevor Noah, Jamie MacDonald, and Stewart Lee, who provide the transcribed examples analyzed in this article.

A point worth restating here is that the initial ideas that vexed me have always already been informed from the get-go by preliminary understanding. In principle, this method of investigation, labeled *abductive* by the American polymath Charles Sanders Peirce (alongside inductive reasoning and deductive progression), questions

[17] I would like to take note of the particular quality of open mic clubs as explicit forums for "training" or experimentation in a slightly more carefree performance register. In this regard, one might say that explicit framing of one's performance as "work-in-progress" (as the defining feature of open-mic stand-up clubs) foregrounds stand-up as an "aesthetic of effort" and the aspect of labor inherent in all performances. According to this aesthetic, the audience takes pleasure in seeing how much effort has gone into the making of a piece of work (Frith 1996, 207, 222). The apparent conflict between this aesthetic and the aesthetic of *effortlessness* that is endemic to stand-up in general, then, is behind much of the fun of open mic clubs (cf. Lintott 2017, 365).

any simple causal relationship between an actual encounter (of stand-up) and the theoretical reflection thereupon. Coincidentally, abduction is also the fundamental epistemological mode of social life. As Webb Keane (2018, 83) explains, abductive reasoning does not have the same certainty or stability as logical deductions and inductions but is rather inherently "probabilistic," because sign processes themselves are inherently open and growing. What such research aims at, I would like to add, is not certainty but reliability (Engelke 2008).

To further characterize the research process within which this dissertation has found its present form, in the initial stages of the project I often aimed at detailed analyses of singular stand-up routines from the vantage point of verbal art and performance. Such an orientation toward stand-up as verbal art informed my earliest analyses on reflexivity and genre (Lindfors 2016; not included in the dissertation), irony and its real-time contextualization (Lindfors 2015; not included in the dissertation), parallelism and stance (Article III), and gestures and narration (Article IV), all of them written during the first half of the research process (circa 2013–2015). In retrospect, I would say that my methodological orientation and interests have since widened, in that I have grown to perceive stand-up comedy as a phenomenon through which to study various aspects of contemporary culture and communication. In particular, such a broader research orientation has guided my articles on satire and moral accountability (Article II) and on stand-up comedy as a reflexively attuned performance of self-presentation (Article I).

In working with stand-up comics, I have always made sure to show each citation of them to these performers themselves. I have provided each performer featured in my research with the opportunity to comment on my analyses of their performances in advance of publication (excluding those foreign performers analyzed through commercial recordings). I have usually checked before starting the work (i.e., analyzing and writing) whether it is fine with a given comic for me to use certain bits and routines as material. I have also tried to focus on routines that are already publicly available (which has often been impossible, however).

Although the method may be described as ethnographic participant observation, I would ultimately characterize my position as that of an outsider to stand-up comedy. Given that I have been asked about this so many times, I think it is fair to state it explicitly: I am not a stand-up comic myself, and I have never done stand-up myself (while I may admit to having occasionally fantasized about doing it). I am writing this study from the perspective of someone who enjoys stand-up and seeks to understand its particularities.

2.2 Questionnaire: Genre as Metadiscourse

The second main source of research material for this study is produced through a questionnaire I conducted with Finnish stand-up comics during 2017–2018. In order to grasp something of the versatility of the field, I approached stand-up comics without regard for the time of their involvement in stand-up, meaning both professionals and long-time proponents of the genre, as well as newcomers to the field. In particular, I wanted to reach performers who represented both the mainstream and the fringes of the scene. Personal preferences certainly had an effect on my choices as well.

At its broadest, the questionnaire consisted of 20 questions within the six main themes of: 1) general questions, 2) stage persona, 3) material, 4) privacy/personality, 5) performance, and 6) influence.[18] I was specifically interested in learning about stand-up as public, interactive introspection and about the personal aspects of stand-up for comics themselves. For example, I asked: "Does stand-up comedy as a performance genre enable self-reflection and the addressing of personal or intimate subjects in a particular way, and how?" Further still, I was interested to hear about the development and current state of Finnish stand-up according to the performers themselves. (See Appendix: Questionnaire.)

I received 17 written sets of answers to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was in an open format, so that there was no predesignated limit to the length of each answer. The questionnaire has proven especially valuable in nuancing what I have designated as the metapragmatics of stand-up, which was something that I had in the earlier articles approached mainly through secondary literary and media texts such as stand-up manuals and earlier research. As a methodological guiding idea, I aimed at correlating the themes raised in the questionnaire with actual stand-up performances and other materials. The written answers of comics have thus oriented my analytic gaze and inspired me to look at and pose questions for performances in fruitful ways. I have made use of this corpus in Article I as well as in the later sections of the present introduction.

Since then, I have also continued to exchange emails with certain comics. For instance, I have discussed the therapeutic potential of stand-up with Teemu Vesterinen, received further elaboration from James Lórien MacDonald on introducing oneself as a transgender person on the stand-up stage, as well as consulted Aki Puolakka on the significance of different stand-up venues and types of laughter, amongst other things.

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[18] While originally comprised of 20 questions, the questionnaire was since shortened somewhat, as I learned to focus on those questions that seemed the most important or the most fruitful.

I treat the second corpus of texts as metasemiotic discourse, or simply *metadiscourse*, that regiments the genre of stand-up comedy in the Finnish context. However, while by definition regimenting and "commenting on" other discourse, the notion of metasemiotic discourse is not merely of secondary importance. Rather than being a reflection, refraction, or index of the "real thing"—in this case, stand-up comedy as performance practice—metadiscourse participates as an element of the cultural reality it comments on, bearing a meaningful, and occasionally even causally determinant, relationship with its object (see also Wickberg 1998, 3).[19]

More broadly, the second category of "genre as metadiscourse" also covers my grasp of the development and establishment of stand-up as part of Finnish cultural life (see the historically inclined Chapter 3). For instance, as part of the metadiscursive regimentation of stand-up, I have followed the nascent genre of criticism on stand-up in Finland (and to some degree abroad). After all, it is in large measure through critiques, editorials, advertisements, and other media texts that images of authors, performers, works, and entire genres are construed (see Lefevere 1992).

2.3 Netflix and Miscellanea: Genre as Commodity

Stand-up comedy is a highly adaptable mode of discourse and performance, erecting its intangible "performance arena" (Foley 1995) as effortlessly in the corner of a living room as in a stadium—just take a look at Maria Bamford's stand-up special *Old Baby* (2017), where such malleability of form is investigated. To complement my perspectives on stand-up as performance and metadiscourse, I have also made use of commercially edited and distributed stand-up recordings and other media texts. In the main, this corpus comprises commercial stand-up specials released by the American video-streaming service Netflix in 2017.

In an effort to double their original content production and outdo competitors such as HBO and Hulu, Netflix made headlines by announcing the release of one stand-up special per week during 2017 (see Liptak 2017; Fontana 2017). Even though the year's total ultimately amounted to 46 stand-up specials (by my

[19] This is in line with one of the fundamental tenets of the philosophical orientation of pragmatism, which denies all sharp dichotomies between practice (pragmatics) and theory (metapragmatics) and situates both on the same level of what is conceptualized as a univocal reality (Pihlström 2011, 2; for univocity as a philosophical principle, see also Colebrook 2002, 32–34). According to an old anthropological principle, however, people do one thing, say they do another thing, and think that they do a third thing. The chronotope in which all of these modes of knowledge—thinking, doing, and communicating—would be aligned with each other is a utopia (see also Rancière 2004, 40).

counting), the full catalogue constitutes an impressive compendium of who's who in contemporary American stand-up with the occasional British or French comedian thrown in. The catalogue includes such luminaries of the genre as Jerry Seinfeld, Louis CK, Sarah Silverman, and Dave Chappelle (who returned from his hiatus with not one but four stand-up specials), alongside relatively lesser known cult figures, such as Norm MacDonald, Maria Bamford, and Judah Friedlander (see References: Netflix Stand-Up Specials). While the full spectrum is naturally wide and varied, some of the recurring themes on many comics' lips in the year 2017 (or rather in 2016, when many of the specials were recorded) revolved around the presidency of Donald Trump, freedom of speech, and victimhood culture.

This body of 46 Netflix stand-up specials provides me with an up-to-date corpus of internationally high-profile stand-up comedy that can be deemed influential in terms of general visibility. In short, it is to an extent through such mass-mediated text-artifacts that general impressions of stand-up can be argued as being construed and evaluated. I would further argue that these specials, when combined with participant observation in the scene in Helsinki, usefully complement each other in forming a rounder picture of stand-up comedy as an artform. In this regard, while the current research is not comparative in design, the Netflix stand-up specials have provided me with a counterpoint against which to contrast the Finnish scene I am most familiar with. In terms of accessibility, commercially available material also facilitates the reader's possibilities for acquainting herself with the data. Besides the present introduction, I draw from the Netflix corpus in Article I.

In addition to Netflix, I have also taken the liberty of employing other commercial stand-up releases. For example, in earlier articles I made use of material from British performers such as Stewart Lee and Josie Long, as well as from the American Hari Kondabolu (Articles III and IV). The other miscellanea underlying this study are constituted by various media texts related to stand-up. In the past years, the Finnish scene has witnessed three television series that have dealt with stand-up: *Naurun tasapaino* ("*The Balance of Laughter*," three seasons between 2013–2015), which is a stand-up competition; the more recent *Stand-up!*, which showcases the most well-known faces of Finnish stand-up; and *Big in Finland* (2017), which recounts the tale of two stand-up comics, Pietari Vihula and Henric Chezek, on their way to conquer the American stand-up scene. While these series have not been taken up here as objects of close scrutiny, their inclusion in the data contextualizes my other findings as regards the formation of Finnish stand-up comedy.

2.4 Comedy Academy

So far in my text, the notion of stand-up comedy—and indeed, "comedy"—has figured as a given, and yet I do not assume that there exists a ready consensus about

how stand-up comedy should be defined as an object of study, or about what it is even.[20] To say the least, comedy itself is a "complex concept with a long and arduous history in numerous fields," to cite Ian Bogost (2010, 42) on the related notion of "play." Moreover, cultural phenomena such as stand-up are too overdetermined to be reasonably reduced into this or that variable, emerging as combinations of various cultural, social, psychological, historical, and biological functions. Further still, comedy, humor, and laughter as modes of perception and action are inextricably linked through embodied cognition (e.g., Freud 1960; Fauconnier & Turner 2002; Coulson 2001; Hurley et al. 2013; Weems 2014), cultural and historical practice (e.g., Apte 1985; Knuuttila 1992; Parvulescu 2010; Webber 2013; Szakolczai 2013), aesthetics (e.g., Bergson 1935; Cohen 2003; Zupančič 2008), and ethics (e.g., Wagg 1998; Lockyer & Pickering 2005; Berlant & Ngai 2017).

Acknowledging the resistant character of comedy as regards formal definition, I have been content to discuss stand-up comedy as embodied performance and semiotic interaction. Whereas a philosopher concerned with defining her key analytic categories might see this as failure, as an ethnographic category (stand-up) comedy—however imprecise it may be in formal or theoretical terms—is perfectly sufficient to orient the researcher to the cultural domain of interest. In other words, I have chosen to resist the theoretically all-consuming flame of "comedy" by circling around it rather than plunging in head-on.

While ten or fifteen years ago it would have probably still been possible to depict "stand-up studies" as somewhat neglected, uncharted, or an otherwise eternally emergent field of study, I would characterize the contemporary constellation of this field as fairly dynamic and interdisciplinary.[21] For one, stand-up seems to attract researchers from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, ranging from

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20 For prototypical features of the genre, see Brodie 2014, 14–15. For a discursive perspective on several closely related genres of monologue performance art, including spoken word, stand-up, and artistic monologue, see Peterson 1998.

21 It is true that stand-up was not found as an object of academic interest until the 1980s, when the first preliminary articles (Koziski 1984; Mintz 1985) came out: stand-up comedy has not been regarded as meriting detailed study, largely for disciplinary and institutional reasons that go beyond the purview of the present dissertation. However, compare this with how Misha Kavka (2008, 46–47) depicts the adverse reaction of academics to (reality) television: "In averting shame by disavowing interest, however, television theory has repudiated the affective appeal of the medium or has characterized the medium as being of no socio-political consequence. The former has rendered television invisible as a medium of intimacy, while the latter, because we are ashamed of the interest that envelops us within the television apparatus, devalues the attention we pay the medium." Historically, the seedy and lowly associations with comedy were probably also affected by the fact that in the 1930s and 1940s comedians actually found their patrons from amongst members of organized crime (see Nesteroff 2015, Chapter Three).

literary and theater studies, anthropology and sociology to applied linguistics and cross-disciplinary humor studies. As perhaps the most obvious predecessor to my own work, folklore scholar Ian Brodie (2008; 2014) has conducted pioneering work on stand-up as a vernacular performance genre, while literary scholar John Limon (2000) deserves mention as the author of the first "theory" of stand-up comedy (i.e., abjection)—quite influentially I would add, having had an effect in sparking my own initial interest toward the genre.

Methodologically speaking, one could divide the broad diversity of stand-up studies into those that emphasize 1) verbal or non-verbal *performance interaction* (see, e.g., Rutter 2000; Yus 2004; Glick 2007; Scarpetta & Spagnolli 2009; Chun & Walters 2011; Lockyer & Myers 2011; Seizer 2011; Vigouroux 2015; Adetunji 2013; 2016; Filani 2015; 2017), and those that attend to it through 2) *power relations and identity politics* (see, e.g., Chun 2004; Gilbert 2004; Lee 2004; Pelle 2010; Mizejewski 2014; Krefting 2014; Colleary 2015; Thomas 2015; Quirk 2015; 2018; Meier & Schmitt 2017; Igomu 2018; Smith 2018). In contributing to the existing literature by offering a perspective on stand-up comedy as embodied verbal art and semiotic interaction, the present dissertation combines aspects of both categories, while arguably laying more emphasis on the former.

In addition to the major categories of performance interaction and power, stand-up has been appropriated in diverse studies representing such perspectives as therapeutics (Stevens 2012) and intellectual property norms (Oliar & Sprigman 2011). While for the most part dealt with within the context of BA and MA theses (for theses written by Finnish stand-ups, see Jyvälä 2013; Tohni 2015; Vilja 2018; MacDonald 2018), the Finnish stand-up scene has been studied by anthropologist Marianna Keisalo. The ongoing work by Keisalo, who has also done fieldwork (and comedy!) on the stand-up scene in Helsinki, focuses on stand-up dynamics through Roy Wagnerian (1986) figure-ground reversals (Keisalo 2016a; 2018a; 2018b; see also Keisalo 2016b).

As a final note, I would like to elaborate a bit on a persistent problem that I experienced throughout this study: struggles with the definition or even plausible characterization of the type of stand-up I have used. To put it mildly, stand-up comedy is difficult to put into neat boxes, with the moniker encompassing a mixed bag of performers only loosely categorized into distinct styles or subgenres. Often set against the baseline of what is labeled (sometimes pejoratively) "observational comedy," such styles and subgenres of stand-up include shock and cringe comedy, family entertainers, one-liner artists, comics with a surrealist or absurdist bent, satirists, and socially inclined activist-performers—not to mention that individual

performers can and will also alternate between all of these styles, during the same performance no less.[22]

Symptomatically, such impressionistic and notional rather than formal and analytic characterizations also abound in scientific literature on stand-up, where it is possible to see scholars claiming their ground through affective or descriptive delineations such as "charged comedy" (Krefting 2015) or "the tradition of the confrontational comedy of offense" (DesRochers 2014, xi). To follow up on such predecessors, I would characterize my preferred type of stand-up (within the present dissertation) as that which evokes a feel of autobiographical or confessional relevance, or rather as that which stages and trades on confessionalism and autobiographical relevance (see also Grobe 2017). To paraphrase Teemu Vesterinen on how he prefers to talk about "real life" in his comedy, I also prefer to hear comedy that draws from the same domain, and I see no shame in admitting it.

In delineating my focus in this manner, then, I have been personally involved in finding out what exactly is going on in performance events marked by the affects of immediacy and authentic self-presence. To address the problem in the present, however, we need to look at the genealogy of such autobiographical or confessional relevance in the history of modern stand-up. This is the objective of the next chapter.

[22] The notion of observational comedy as being content with extracting comic insights from seemingly apolitical resonances of everyday life is complicated by the fact that the "observational" in observational comedy is what is called a shifter or an "empty signifier." The American stand-up comic Hari Kondabolu sharply reveals the ideological crux of the matter in an interview: "I talk about issues that are close to my heart—usually things having to do with oppression and power and injustice. I say that and people are like, 'Well, those are political things.' But to me, these are the things that shape everybody's day-to-day [life], and that seems bigger than just calling it 'political.' To me, that's observational" (Becks 2017). In other words, the attribute of observational is apolitical and trivial only for one whose everyday life proceeds without a level of awareness and experience of social and political inequality, injustice, and oppression.

3. The Roots and Fruits of Stand-Up

> One ridicules in order to forget.
> – Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 33)

Even though Mikhail Bakhtin might have been onto something when he wrote that there is no place for memory nor tradition in the world of comedy, comedy as cultural and aesthetic practice is both a tradition-mediated and mediating phenomenon. In particular, relatively stable cultural forms such as stand-up comedy emerge as derivations and precipitates of anterior forms, while constantly feeding into emergent forms and practices.

This chapter selectively unveils such "roots and fruits" (Kockelman 2013) of stand-up comedy in terms of its Western lineage in general and its Finnish branch in particular. While admittedly far from exhaustive, the discussion is genealogically motivated in retrospectively tracing the ideals of immediacy and self-presence in contemporary stand-up through the so-called confessional or autobiographical turn of stand-up during the mid-1900s. This is done not for the sake of complementing historical records (to which I do not contribute), but in order to ground my own take on the genre. The chapter also provides a brief historical look at stand-up in the Finnish context.

While the exact proportions of the investments of each genre depend on whom one might ask, the roots of stand-up are typically located in (at least) two major genres of Western popular entertainment: English music hall and American vaudeville (see Double 2014, Chapters 3 and 4; Brodie 2014; Zoglin 2008). These genres—or rather "genre colonies" (see Bhatia 2004) constituted by motley assemblies of verbal and non-verbal comic performance, dance, music, and mime—reigned in Western popular entertainment and theater in the early 1900s (Double 2014; see also Green & Swan 1986). Henry Jenkins (1992, 22–25) characterizes the "vaudeville aesthetic" as "a different performer-spectator relationship, a fragmented structure, a heterogeneous array of materials, and a reliance upon crude shock to produce emotionally intense responses."[23] Often described by today's standards as

[23] Vaudeville itself drew influences from a variety of sources, in particular from "the *tummler* (the tumult or noise-maker) of the Yiddish stage tradition, comic female

relatively crude and detached in trading on easily recognizable characterizations and impersonally clichéd routines, the legacy of vaudeville and music hall for modern stand-up seems to have been mostly structural and dramaturgical in nature. That is to say, both vaudeville and music hall were emblematically non-narrative, eschewing narrative trajectory and character development in favor of mutually unrelated comic sequences (DesRochers 2014, 6). Echoes of these predecessors, such as fragmentary structure and a general disrespect of narrative development, can also be detected in modern stand-up comedy.

Like most cultural innovations, stand-up comedy did not declare itself with a manifesto and bombast—by contrast, the genre seems to have emerged almost as if by accident. As is so often the case, stand-up also gained its moniker in reverse, presumably after crossing critical thresholds of cultural currency and frequency of discursive circulation (see Grobe 2017, 6; see Wickberg 1998, 80).[24] The stabilization of "stand-up comedy" as both a discursive term and performance form was occasioned during the mid-1900s, described by the stand-up scholar Rebecca Krefting (2014, 39–40) as a time during which "interest in the individual or self, the ascendancy of social sciences, especially modern psychology, a rise in enrollment in higher education, and theological shifts emphasizing love and forgiveness over discipline and self-abnegation all contributed to the desire for spontaneity and improvisation and fostered investment in 'the principles of democracy, diversity, and individual autonomy.'" In short, aesthetics of immediacy, authenticity, and spontaneity were in the air when stand-up as we know it took form.

In particular, the "impulse to valorize spontaneous improvisation runs like a long thread through the cultural fabric of the period, appearing also in bebop jazz music, in modern dance and performance art, in ceramic sculpture, and in philosophical, psychological, and critical writings," as cultural historian Daniel Belgrad (1998, 5) asserts in characterizing the cultural currents of the 1950s, revealingly summarizing the basic attributes of the "alternative metaphysics" in which this culture of spontaneity was rooted as *intersubjectivity* and *body–mind holism*. The closest influences on stand-up during this time were poetry and jazz. As

performers in burlesque, medicine show con-men and their stump speeches (monologues that mocked political speeches or religious sermons), and the blackface performers of minstrel shows" (DesRochers 2014, xi).

24 Accounts of the first use of "stand-up comedy" differ considerably. Oliver Double (2014, Chapter Two) traces the term (at least) back to 1959, after being stupefied by *Oxford English Dictionary*'s dating of 1966, but Christopher Grobe (2017, 8) places the origin to "circa 1954." Furthermore, Kliph Nesteroff (2015, 53) cites the comedian Dick Curtis presenting the term "stand-up comic" as an invention of the early 20th-century mob that managed fighters: "A stand-up fighter is a guy that is a puncher. A stand-up guy was a guy who was tough and you could depend on. […] A guy who just stood there and punched jokes—joke, joke, joke—he was a stand-up comic."

Lenny Bruce's biographer Albert Goldman puts it: "Jazz was one thing. Poetry another. Comedy was something in between." Joel Dinerstein (2017, 354), a self-appointed authority on "American cool," confirms that in the 1950s jazz was the "soundtrack and artistic model" across the American artistic communities of "method actors, transgressive comedians, Beat writers, abstract expressionists." Perhaps primarily in terms of ethos and structure, contemporary jazz seems to have served an exemplary function for early stand-up comics in their shared flight from the constraints of scripted form.[25] While I do not have the space to address this issue in further detail here, it would be interesting to explore the influence of jazz and other modernist forms on stand-up in terms of their shared intransitive emphasis on process and form over content and subject matter. That is to say, it seems to me as if the 1950s was a watershed time also in terms of stand-ups suddenly becoming as reflexively concerned with language and its performance itself as with just "telling a story" (Rancière 2004, 53).

Initiated by figures such as Lenny Bruce, Mort Sahl, and Jonathan Winters, this period also saw a reinvention of stand-up in terms of social relevance and autobiographical resonance, both of which would be associated with the genre ever since. Afflicted by what Nesteroff (2015, 155, 169) describes as "pangs of social relevance," post-war stand-up comics came to use their personalities, selves, and bodies as material for their art in an unprecedented manner, in stark comparison with the old school who "told jokes that bore little, if any, relation to their 'real' lives, feelings, or political views" (Zoglin 2008, 2, 13; see also Krefting 2014, 40). Tracing evidence of what he sees as a broader "confessional turn" in Western art forms, performance scholar Christopher Grobe (2017, 7–8) posits that whereas comics had been saying "I" for ages, suddenly they seemed to really *mean* it. (In general, Grobe traces the lineage of "confessionalism" from poetry in the 1950s to stand-up in the '60s, to performance art in the '70s, theater in the '80s, television in the '90s, and all sorts of online media platforms by the 2000s.) Stand-ups adopted these novel ideals to the extent that by the 1970s, not only was autobiographical and confessional orientation expected of stand-up comics but eagerly demanded of them (Grobe 2017, 10).[26] To summarize in my chosen terms, this period saw a sea change in the

[25] Joel Dinerstein (2017, 354) draws from contemporary comedian David Steinberg in positing that when "[Lenny] Bruce took an idea or phrase and deconstructed it from many angles, listened to and shifted along with the crowd's response, he employed a jazz method of spontaneous improvisation in public. It was simultaneously a self-dialogue, a monologue, and a conversation with the audience."

[26] As for reformations of the theatrical arts more generally, Jacques Rancière (2004; see also Lehmann 2004) has suggested a basic distinction between 1) reformations that aim at provocation, at somehow getting their audiences to think, which is a strategy associated with the figure of Bertolt Brecht, and 2) those that aim at incorporating their audiences into the "magic circle" of theatre as "social play" (see Fichter-Lichte 2008,

dominant metapragmatics of stand-up in that its indexical valuations—its "I"s, "you"s, "here"s, and "now"s—were changed for good.

The breakthrough of stand-up from impersonal to personal reference and social relevance bore direct implications in regard to performance interaction. Offering newly configured authentic personae with a social message, the form of stand-up comedy as face-to-face interaction between (seemingly) equal interlocutors has also been described as being foregrounded at this time (Zoglin 2008). While it might have seemed that the theatrical "fourth wall" of the (often merely proverbial) proscenium arch of stand-up comedy was now torn down for good, I think it is also worth asking why it was erected in the first place. After all, the distinctions between the chronotopic frames of "onstage performance" and the outside "real world" are mutually implicating designations, not something found already in place. In this regard, Christopher Grobe (2017, 8) correlates the tendency of stand-up comics to introduce "real world" objects such as newspapers, medical records, or telephones (probably even more efficient before the age of the computer and mobile phone) onto the stand-up stage with the impression of a performer "bursting out of the spotlight and into the world, breaking out of persona and into a personal mode." This practice has also survived to the present day, such as when Sarah Silverman deploys home-video footage of her medical operation at the end of her stand-up special *A Speck of Dust* (2017).

While I am generally sympathetic to Grobe, I would emphasize that such objects and representations perform significant boundary work in staging the chronotopes of "onstage performance" and outside "real world" vis-à-vis each other, *while simultaneously* obscuring and breaking down their mutual distinctions. The notion of the fourth wall that is invoked in both popular and academic discourses of stand-up (e.g., Double 2014; Wickström 2003) thus functions as an imaginary boundary that separates what is private from what is public, just as much as it functions as a screen through which it is possible to enjoy those private spaces—in public. In an analogically revealing fashion, Misha Kavka (2008, 21–22) speaks of an *ideological materialization* of the "fourth wall" in 1950s U.S. television (itself heavily inspired by vaudeville), which was produced, she argues, in order for it to be broken through: "The window, in other words, materialized at the very point that intimate space (of the family) became a subject of televisual interest." Comparably, one could argue that the moment stand-up found its confessional mode was the point in Western cultural history when personal intimacy was becoming increasingly

32), a strategy envisioned archetypically by Antonin Artaud. While shades of Brechtian detachment are occasionally suggested and identified in stand-up (e.g., Double 2014; Lee 2010), for some reason it has not been customary to associate the collective/participatory performance form of stand-up with Artaudian theater of cruelty.

public and when the public was becoming increasingly intimate (for this shift, see Oleksy 2009; Plummer 2003).

Having found its confessional mode and (freedom from) form in the 1950s, the story of stand-up is typically recounted as stand-up securing broader cultural footing for itself during the ’60s and ’70s, achieving its commercial zenith with the help of 1980s cable television, and then devolving again into nightclub entertainment in the 1990s. It took the turn of the millennium, however, until the fruits of stand-up were ripening in other parts of the world as well. While primarily speaking for the English context, and thereby acknowledging the significance of British television (through the TV shows *Mock the Week* and *Live at the Apollo*) in bringing stand-up comics to people’s living rooms, Oliver Double (2014) contextualizes the newfound international popularity of stand-up with the historical shift simultaneously occasioned by the rise of digital and social networking. Double (2014, 49–50) notes that whereas YouTube has made stand-up recordings “infinitely more accessible,” comedians have also eagerly adopted Twitter as a medium in which to hone joke-writing skills. As importantly, such online presence of stand-up has also had offline ramifications, raising awareness of the form while perhaps also whetting the public’s appetite for live comedy (Double 2014, 54).

In this regard, the Finnish context provides an interesting vantage point onto the contemporary international character of stand-up. In a similar fashion with some other Scandinavian countries, stand-up has been practiced in Finland for a relatively short amount of time. While it is fairly common to identify Finnish predecessors of stand-up comedy in seemingly homegrown entertainment forms such as soirees (*iltamat*)—albeit that stand-up is an essentially *urban* form of performance, as some commentators emphasize—it is also regarded as standard knowledge that stand-up did not properly emerge in Finland until the 1990s. After the first pioneers of the ’90s, many of whom represented the Finnish-Swedish minority in Finland (e.g., André Wickström, Stan Saanila), stand-up was ready for its entrance into the fields of mainstream entertainment at the turn of the 2000s (also Kormilainen 2019). Importantly, this early period was marked by the release of two influential stand-up manuals, which both introduced and established the fundamentals of the genre for its Finnish practitioners (namely, Toikka & Vento 2000 and Wickström 2005; see also Marjamäki 2007).

Since then, the popularity of stand-up has only expanded, to the extent that stand-up can now be regarded as having established its cultural bearings amongst other popular cultural forms in Finland, attracting more diverse demographics as regards both practitioners and audiences. This is also reflected in the number of active comics there are, with approximations ranging between 200–250 comedians, which is quite a lot for a small nation of five and a half million people (Keisalo 2018a, 120). It is also possible to argue that Finnish audiences have simultaneously

gained in generic competence when it comes to enjoying stand-up in the first place. While older Finnish stand-up comics have reminisced how audiences practically had to be educated into the genre of stand-up—in an especially memorable account, stand-up Riku Suokas remembers how audience members tried to "help" stand-ups by offering them their own jokes in the middle of performance—it is fair to assume that contemporary audiences have watched enough stand-up to understand the idiosyncrasies of this genre, e.g., as a largely scripted form where audience involvement is both encouraged and constrained onto a narrow repertoire of appropriately placed, largely non-referential indexical responses (see also Kormilainen 2019).

The history of stand-up in Finland would not be complete without addressing what could be described in mild terms as the skepticism aroused by it. This skepticism has been curiously ethnocentric in nature, in that stand-up as an Anglo-American performance and entertainment form has frequently been argued as ill-suited for the Finnish mentality or culture (see Sundman 2018). At times, such views have been affected by the reputation of Finnish culture as representing an oral environment where, "unless one has anything substantial to say, silence is strongly preferred over small talk and 'phatic communion' [i.e., "loose" communication that merely sustains an interaction without providing new information] would consequently be experienced as an unwelcome violation of social custom" (Varis and Blommaert 2015). Perhaps a more metacultural stereotype than actual reality, this reputation has served for Finnish stand-ups as a ground against which to work and contrast themselves. (See also Lindfors 2019.)

From early on, both cultural resistance and the absence of a local tradition have resulted in Finnish stand-ups taking an oppositional position with respect to their audiences. As Teemu Vesterinen reminisced about the beginnings of stand-up in Finland:

> I believe that at first, from the year 2000 when I started following and in 2001 performing stand-up, those pursuing comedy were under a burden of proof. Or at least I strongly experienced it that way. That is, people were perplexed about what was going on. And skepticism whether or not this could work was common. And the first five years [we] were very much against these negative attitudes and received pleasure from getting some grumpy person at the gig, and even enjoyed it. That is, we proselytized.

While general attitudes around stand-up have certainly changed for the positive, on par with the increased popularity of stand-up, one could argue that stand-up continues to enjoy a relatively low cultural place in Finnish cultural life. I agree with the Finnish stand-up comic Jukka Lindström who has frequently brought attention to stand-up's neglect within popular media, pointing out that to some extent stand-

up is not even recognized as an art form in Finland (see, e.g., Paavilainen 2017). However, while it is true that the historically unprecedented stadium gig by the mainstream stand-up Sami Hedberg in 2016 received virtually no coverage in the Finnish press, Ismo Leikola's victory as the "Funniest Person in the World" was widely noted in the popular press, as have been his subsequent appearances in the US media.

I would also raise a question about the culturally inflected social functions of comedy in general. Although I cannot unfortunately address this in detail here, I find it important to ask whether Finnish people might not be as accustomed to listening to comics for social or political critique as they might be in the US or UK, given that Finnish stand-ups do not have the privilege and advantage of a long lineage of comedians and stand-ups before them operating as social critics. In Finland, one could argue, stand-up comics are only just beginning to be recognized as potential social critics or public conversationalists—this, in fact, after several years of demands from the audience that Finnish stand-ups should be more societally and politically inclined (see Vedenpää 2017). It has only recently become possible for Finnish stand-ups to present themselves as "canaries in mines, testing the boundaries of democracy" (Kekkonen 2017) or able to discuss the social ramifications of political satire (e.g., Valkama 2017); something like this was very much unheard of, say, ten years ago.

While stand-up's detractors still occasionally prophesy that it will fade into oblivion, the past two decades have seen it finding its place and establishing its status as part of Finnish culture. In this regard, it has been particularly intriguing in the past years to bear witness to the upsurge of Finnish comics representing various social minorities, as well as the nascent division of the Finnish field into subgenres and styles. Indeed, what initially sparked my interest in the genre was the group Paukutusjengi, formed in 2013 with the explicit aim of diversifying the Finnish scene by introducing societal and political strains in their comedy (see Lindfors 2016). Since then, the scene in Helsinki has been complemented by various other alternative clubs, such as Feminist Comedy Night (organized by Jamie MacDonald) and Kekkosklubi (run by Juuso Kekkonen), both concentrating on socially relevant or otherwise non-mainstream comics. As another important milestone in terms of diversity (and reflecting frustration with male dominance in the field), the year 2017 saw the founding of an exclusive club for female comics called All Female Panel (see Keisalo 2018b).

While during the earlier period in the 1990s comics had to work hard at establishing stand-up clubs and introducing the form to the general public, after twenty years or so it has become possible to focus on pushing the genre in new directions. In particular, this development has manifested itself as an increasing awareness of the social implications of the form—not wholly dissimilar to what

happened within the genre elsewhere during the 1950s. In the context of stand-up, social awareness often implies a movement toward an aesthetics where one's persona becomes increasingly personal, while the personal (if it even bears mentioning) is always already political.

4. Economy of Relatability

In this chapter, I will explore and develop further some of the themes and perspectives that I have touched on here and there in my articles (mostly Articles I, II, and IV) but have not previously had the space to properly address. First, I begin with the ideal and affect of immediacy in stand-up. By drawing from recent work on situated affectivity (Slaby et al. 2017; Slaby 2018; Slaby & von Scheven 2019), I inquire into the kinds of affective resonances these performances trade on, framing stand-up broadly as an "affective arrangement" that patterns, channels, and modulates affects in recurrent and repeatable ways (Slaby et al. 2017, 3). More broadly, I envision stand-up as an economy of relatability that depends on moral and affective capture between participants of interaction, beginning from the premise—but not limiting myself to that alone—that one relates to others primarily by invoking shared experience. In part, I aim for what could be described as a linguistic anthropological take on the notion of affect (cf. Wilce 2009a).

Second, the latter half of the chapter is focused on the tensions between individuality or self-presence and typicality or recognizability in stand-up. In particular, I build on and combine some of the implications of Articles I and IV by conceptualizing stand-up as a continuum from performance of self to animation of voice, where movement from one end of the spectrum to the other could be described as a trajectory of becoming-character (Nozawa 2013).

In their collaborative effort on "excommunication"—the impossibility of communication as being integral to communication itself—media theorists Galloway, Thacker, and Wark (2014, 2) offer an instruction according to which "text may be read backward into its mediatic status, just as it may be read forward into its hermeneutic status. Each approach may find gold hidden in the cracks between the letters." In particular, for them the "mediatic" approach forces "us to think less about things like senders and receivers, and more about questions of channels and protocols. Less about encoding and decoding, and more about context and environment. Less about writing and reading, and more about structures of interaction" (2014, 2). Taking heed of these authors' suggestion, this chapter is dedicated to the performance event of stand-up comedy as an "experience of sociality" (Frith 1996, 204) or, if you will, to the nuggets hidden in the stand-up

performances themselves. This also means that my primary focus in what follows is on stand-up comedy as live experience, as an event experienced *in situ* rather than through technologically mediated recordings and edited stand-up specials, the consumption of which inevitably alters the affective group dynamic of this art form. Without further ado, then, let us delve into this experience by starting with affect.

4.1 Attention and Affect

Stand-up is about getting up and staying up. What are the implications of such a heuristic definition? While we might be tempted to regard stand-up as being in many respects about making people laugh or about telling a gripping story, about surprise or about expecting the unexpected, perhaps about relating with the audience or sharing a moment, I would suggest that these answers all presuppose a more fundamental category of attention (for attention as an immaterial commodity, see Paasonen 2016; Crogan & Kinsley 2012; Webster 2014; see also Noyes 2016a, Chapter 5). While laughter is certainly the most perceivable affective index that stand-up comics receive for their work, even laughter necessitates attention rather than the other way around—indeed, in stand-up laughter can be described as the "somatic mode of attention" (Csordas 2009, 139) par excellence.

In this regard, stand-up is about *grabbing* the attention of a group of strange and familiar people, about *holding* that attention for a given period of time by being interesting, relatable, outrageous, fun, or any combination thereof, and about *purposefully managing* that attention (see also Lindfors 2019). The reward for an audience member, then, lies in the chance to experientially imagine the world, for a brief moment, from the perspective of an Other—whether or not one might think of having anything in common with that other individual in advance. Or, it might lie in the possibility of merely *resonating* with this Other on some other frequency rather than what could be called empathetic identification: say, of resonating through fascination, curiosity, or interest.[27]

Quite simply, by maintaining attention you will "stay up" in the game and be rewarded with laughs, but by losing the attention you will lose your laughs—and the

[27] And this is precisely why I prefer the notion of "relatability", and the framework of affect and resonance that I associate with it, over the classical notion of "identification". That is, identification would refer to (the condition of) similarity, and drive our analysis toward a relatively limiting lens of "being similar", for instance to the assumption that audiences would always "identify" with the cultural characters such as stand-ups that they prefer to consume (see also Paasonen 2019). A useful, related notion to consider here would be Sara Ahmed's (2004) "affective economy", which focuses on how affective value or emotional capital comes to be assigned to some figures and some emotional displays rather than others (Wetherell 2012).

game. Social practices related to paying attention, drawing it, and enjoying it are unevenly distributed, however, and this gives stand-up its inherently political label. For instance, one still encounters the persistent misogynistic notion of how "women are not funny" (and thus not worth paying attention to), which has (among other things) rendered the history of stand-up more than a bit male-dominated (Mizejewski 2014; Gilbert 2004; Krefting 2014; Keisalo 2018b; see also Nesteroff 2014). In her account on the "humble theory" of folklore, Dorothy Noyes (2016a, 140) claims that the *folk* in particular—understood as those denied authoritative discourse, the subaltern and the marginalized foil of modernity—need to know how to manipulate attention:

> They are also called upon to pay it: attention is one of the many social taxes from which the powerful are exempted. Men can wonder "what women want," but women have had to know the converse. Homosexuals must know how to read and perform the cues of normative heterosexuality. Servants must anticipate their master's demands; minorities must monitor the moods and deeds of the majority.

The precondition of attention and laughter highlights these performances as quintessentially autopoietic events (Fichter-Lichte 2008, 38, and *passim*.). Autopoiesis refers to the self-organizing, self-referential, and ever-changing feedback loop constitutive of performance events. Perhaps ironically in light of the aura of spontaneity around stand-up, the feedback loop at the heart of stand-up performances is also calibrated by preparations that regulate and redirect audience agency (see Scheer 2012). It is not uncommon for comics to persuade audience members to position themselves in closer proximity to the stage and each other (this happens almost every time in Finland), or control the entrance after the start of the show in order that latecomers not have a distracting effect.

The emblematic sign of stand-up that also betrays its autopoietic nature is the laughter of the audience, of course, which carries the performance onward.[28] While arguably polysemous—one can laugh in derision, out of spite, because of shock, in sympathy, or with "general hilarity"—laughter is not necessarily that polyfunctional

[28] Apart from the microphone and the bare brick wall (see Brodie 2014, 50–51, 56–57; Seizer 2011), a wide-open and (seemingly) laughing mouth is often lifted up as a metonymic icon of stand-up in marketing for books, albums, videos, fliers, and other promotional items (for political implications of the laughing mouth, see Parvulescu 2010). However, exclusive focus on laughter can also obscure the fact that as an aural environment, stand-up events are quite diverse, consisting of clapping, whistling, shouting, groaning—and importantly, of marked absence of laughter or what Michael Billig (2005, Chapter 8) has dubbed "unlaughter"—all of which can affect the performance in different ways (see, e.g., Cheng 2017, 547–549).

in stand-up. That is, laughter in stand-up is a predominantly affirmative and validating sign—or as stand-up comics ironically put it, "derisive laughter is also laughter."[29] In this sense, the vertical metaphor of carrying is appropriate insofar as laughter sustains the stand-up in her task and grants her with power; stand-ups often describe themselves as "riding the waves" of laughter. Finally, laughter seems especially addictive, as is reflected in the fact that comics describe getting "hooked" on laughter and, by implication, on stand-up itself, which provides them with their fix. And this is a drug that the government can't seize—at least not yet.

While often (mis)represented as unilateral monologue, the performance form of stand-up is idiosyncratic in presupposing bodily engagement of audience members—or rather "spectactors," who are strategically activated to engage in a certain "role fraction" (Agha 2007a) or function (Mühlhoff & Schütz 2019)—to the extent that any definitions of the genre appear inadequate without taking audience uptake into account (see Brodie 2009; 2014, 32). To a degree, the stand-up comic and her audience are interactionally accountable in relation to each other. While the stand-up might be graceless in telling an inappropriate joke or otherwise wasting her audience's time, the co-present but silent audience can be perceived as equally graceless in leaving the performer out to dry (see Kotsko 2010, 7). Risked intimacy entails risked embarrassment (Frith 1996, 214), just as laughter as a form of intimacy bears the risk of personal revelation—as every pundit who has laughed at the "wrong" time and been roasted by a stand-up knows. In general, with greater agency comes greater accountability (Kockelman 2013, 196), which I suggest here equals potentially greater affective intensity. Rather than working as an inhibition, the artificially fixed interactional setting of stand-up seems to significantly amplify its affective resonances and tensions. To paraphrase Misha Kavka (2008, 25), the simulated setting of stand-up *stimulates* feeling, "in part because the removal of the participants from their normal surroundings strips them to nothing but the performative space and affect of social interaction."

It is also a basic skill of the stand-up comic to be able to bring about a desired level of participation and immersion in the event, whether through (rhetorical) questions or straightforward orders, such as asking audience members to perform simple tasks (e.g., rubbing each other's shoulders, presumably to induce audience relaxation). As an occasionally contrived performance of spontaneous intimacy, one might describe the aesthetic of stand-up as converging with what Sianne Ngai (2012,

[29] Through a transactional pact between the performer and (paying) audience, the audience in stand-up is not obliged but subtly persuaded to reward the performer with aurally perceivable indexical responses—the more explosive the better. Aki Puolakka explains that stand-ups generally do not regard as successful shows that may have been "nice to watch" but did not evoke laughter. Indeed, a cutting quip exists for such cases: "they didn't laugh but they smiled a lot."

184) labels the "zany" and attributes with "strenuous performance," fluid action, and appealing spontaneity, which simultaneously requires continuous effort on the part of the performer and constantly risks failure.

Stand-up affords a showcasing not only of one's wits but one's discretion or "social grace," expressed as the "ability to roll with the punches when unexpected situations arise rather than being paralyzed by them" (Kotsko 2010, 6). Entire shows can be staged around the performance of such showmanship, that is, around answering the most vexing question: "Is this comic *spontaneously* funny?" As an example, one can look at Judah Friedlander's comedy special *America is the Greatest Country in the United States* (2017), which he concocts out of topics and themes provided for him ad hoc by audience members (a feat which is practically enabled by mixing together video recordings from a number of different gigs). On the other hand, there are always comics—also in the Finnish scene—who seem to revel in the awkwardness that stems from apparent gracelessness who navigate the awkwardly inappropriate performance setting of stand-up with seeming ease. Whereas comics of Friedlander's ilk aim at demonstrating their inherently funny nature, awkward comics might be regarded as engineers of social interaction and propriety.

Working with the primary marketing promise of an extraordinary experience and a unique, unforgettable event, stand-up combines spatial proximity (*here*) with the temporal urgency of discourse (*now*) to invoke affective immediacy and engagement in the event (see Kavka 2008, xi, 6, 15, 19; Mühlhoff & Schütz 2019). Indeed, affect rules stand-up insofar as the promise of affective charge is pretty much why we watch and go see stand-up; it is also probably the reason why stand-up is culturally devalued (see Kavka 2008; Williams 1991).[30] As particularly affect-intensive sites of social interaction, stand-up performances are fruitfully modeled as *affective arrangements* that have been more generally regarded as increasingly central social formations of post-Fordist capitalism. In a manner that I find useful as a description of the collective experience of stand-up as a transpersonal and situated

[30] As far as I can elaborate on my grasp of this notion, affect names the transpersonal, non-discursive, and ever-transforming mood or sensation generated by the stand-up event and environment as predominantly social formation. In much recent cultural theory, which I draw from here, affect has been characterized as something like corporeal immediacy or "radical situatedness" (Slaby 2017), working under the threshold of conscious attention but being all the more efficacious because of that. Often discussed in juxtaposition with emotion as its culturally and sociolinguistically fixed relative, affect is described as diffuse and lacking in salient cause or subjective content, operating through *significance* rather than reflexive signification, *mattering* rather than meaning (Massumi 2002, 28; Kavka 2008, 29–30; Papacharissi 2016, 5; see also Clough & Halley 2007). However, affect can be described as being codified, performed, and released through entextualization (Berlant 2011, 67).

affective dynamic, philosopher Jan Slaby (2019) suggests that an affective arrangement comprises "an array of persons, things, artifacts, spaces, discourses, behaviors, expressions or other materials that coalesce into a coordinated formation of mutual affecting and being-affected" (see also Slaby et al. 2017; Mühlhoff 2015; 2019). These arrangements are characteristically social configurations, bringing multiple human actors into a conjunction, so that these actors' reciprocal contribution to and participation in the dynamic of affecting and being affected functions as the central dimension of the arrangement. From the perspective of affective arrangements, stand-up gigs can be described as moderately immersive, exerting the kind of active allure that Slaby et al. (2017, 3) describe as "potentially drawing individuals into their ambit by offering them occasions for immersion within a sphere of resonance and intensity." They are prepared occasions for ultimately very real social interactions and affective resonances, where people are free (that is, if they have paid the admission) to move about and detach themselves from the arrangement if they so wish (for the bathroom, for more drinks, etc.), or cross its threshold of intensity anew and again "be swayed into the affective fray" (Slaby 2018, 210).[31]

In particular, affective arrangements offer occasions for immersion within a sphere of *affective resonances* of various modalities and registers. Some of these resonances might come to emblematically signify their respective arrangements as genres of cultural practice, as has happened with stand-up comedy and the affective resonances of the humorous register (Mühlhoff 2015; 2019). An evening of stand-up comedy generally passes through the expected affects of amusement, hilarity, communion, empathy, positive excitement, and sheer astonishment, as well as those that could be referred to instead as affective *dissonances* of awkwardness, (second-hand) embarrassment aroused by a particularly bad joke, boredom, shame, and anxiety, the latter explicitly manifested with so-called "anxiety seats," occasionally provided at stand-up gigs for those who might want to exit the show on short notice. As dynamic couplings at the causal level of affecting and being affected, such shared affects or dominant "moods" are transpersonal social constellations rather than personal dispositions, even though they are of course also experienced and felt individually by each participating agent. As Mühlhoff (2019) puts it:

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[31] Such arrangements are further theorized as being fragmentary, open-textured formations. This means that the components brought together retain their individuality but are simultaneously characterized by a mode of relatedness that holds them together—allowing for people to *be themselves together* (this phrasing is borrowed from Limor Shifman's presentation on meme cultures). Such dynamic constellations are also what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) were after with their closely related notion of *agencement* or what has since become customarily translated as "assemblage" (Slaby et al. 2017, 4; Nail 2017; see also Thomas 2015).

> In the unfolding resonance, I contribute to a group dynamic and at the same time I am gripped by it. The dynamic acts on me, it makes me move—not in an externally determined way, but in my own way—and thereby it gets enacted by me, I carry it further. Although the affects of each individual may be different, the affective quality of being-in-resonance is not a composite of individual affective states, but something that happens between individuals.

Affective resonance is analyzed as moving amongst subjects through processes of contagion, entrainment, and rhythmic attunement rather than imitation or willful mimicry, suffusing spaces and environments as moods, atmospheres, and sensations.[32] Such an atmosphere or specific "feel" of an event does not generally condense into one homogenous affective tone but can be described as "more of a discontinuous interweaving of different zones of affective intensity" (Slaby 2018, 209). The contagious spread of affect can be particularly pronounced in performances and other ritualized events where participants develop a mutual focus of attention and become entrained in each other's bodily micro-rhythms and emotions through sheer physical co-presence (Collins 2004, 47; Brennan 2004, 70). Functioning as a compelling reminder of the "uncanny mimetic ground of the social" (Mazzarella 2015, 94), the relation of each audience member to stand-up comic is ideally iconic with the same relation of every other audience member—practically embodied in collective shared laughter. However, as palpably as it is recognized in stand-up that laughter is indeed contagious, that is also understood as being highly contingent on spatial proximity. Stand-up Teemu Vesterinen points out that in bigger night clubs there are often lodges within which the people do not laugh even once, "because they feel they are not part of the group" (Ilmoniemi 2018). Instead, they perceive themselves as being what Erving Goffman would have called "ratified overhearers." That is to say, affective arrangements such as stand-up performances are primarily marked off from their surroundings by *thresholds of intensity* rather than by clear-cut, tangible boundaries such as material spaces—although these matter as well (Slaby et al. 2017). Perhaps one might describe the affect of social

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[32] Adam Kotsko's (2010, 5) evocation of an awkward situation at his favorite pub, where a woman patron suddenly launches into a drawn-out *a capella* performance, serves as an apt designation of what is meant by the diffuse and impersonal character of affect: "We might just as easily say that I feel awkward, that the singing is awkward, or that the situation as a whole is awkward. It is as though the awkwardness is continually on the move, ever present yet impossible to nail down." Rather than being localizable or stable, awkwardness spreads contagiously through the social network. As Kotsko notes (2010, 5), "You can't observe an awkward situation without being drawn in: you are made to feel awkward as well, even if it's probably to a lesser degree than the people directly involved." As Jan Slaby (2019) says, "[a]ffective arrangements are performatively open-ended, capable of extending into their surroundings by incorporating new elements" and agencies.

communion as an essential intensity that demarcates the affective arrangement of stand-up performance into a discernible "inside" and an "outside" (see Slaby et al. 2017, 3).

It is widely acknowledged among comics that stand-up, if it hopes to function at all, depends on precisely such moments of interpersonal resonance, rapport, and relatability, or what these performers simply refer to as "connection." While often explicitly attempted and attained through stock-in-trade interpellations and calls-and-response for a shared experience ("Are there any people from [insert location] here?", "Any polyamorists around tonight?"), interpersonal resonance and rapport are not autonomously or forcibly emergent phenomena. Rather, they have to be established, cultivated, and nurtured, preferably "within the first two minutes," as the Finnish stand-up Kaisa Pylkkänen clarifies:

> For me the most important thing is the creation of that connection. Without it there's nothing. The cut or absence of that connection equals death on stage. […] Without that connection, that we live and breathe the same—my—consciousness, it is difficult to get the gig going.

In other words, stand-up "gets going" once the comic and her audience have established an adequate level of intersubjective common ground. Consider the following variation provided by the veteran stand-up comic Norm MacDonald, who contrasts stand-up with "art" through an image with almost science fiction undertones: "I'm not educated, but I think art means something that two different people can look at and see two different things. But with stand-up, it's all about getting that noise, getting that laugh. And it has to come for everyone at the same time. *Everyone has to think the same thing at the same time*" (Marchese 2017; italics added).

In attempting to recapture and share moments of a distinctive run of thought (see also Klaus 2014, 29), stand-up comics trade on the trope of a *union of minds,* or what William Mazzarella (2017, 134) describes as the "fantasy/nightmare of perfect addressability" (see also Peters 1999, 8–9, 20). Even though typically reified (as above) through such mentalistic notions as "replicated intentions"—or, indeed, the "union of minds"—I would suggest that this connection can be designated as equally cognitive as it is affective and embodied (see Yus 2005). After all, one *lives and breathes* this intersubjective "consciousness," as Pylkkänen so evocatively puts it in the above quote. In other words, the connection referred to by stand-up comics certainly implicates mutual understanding, but it also connotes the positive affects of rapport, relatability, acceptance, and, quite simply, physical co-presence. In short, it also bears the implication of affective resonance vis-à-vis its various modalities. In this sense, stand-up comics are affect-workers; they are experts at producing, manipulating, and picking up different affective intensities to work with. Indeed, this

skill is metadiscursively discussed by the community as "crowdwork" or "working the room/audience," which Oliver Double (2014, 187–202) describes as the capacity of manipulating the "exchange of energy" between the stand-up comic and audience (see also Quirk 2011).

The connection and rapport between performer and audience affects both parties of the interactional event in a manner described by William Mazzarella as constitutively resonant, drawing these parties in a relation of mutual becoming (Mazzarella 2017, 5; see also Mühlhoff 2019; Mechling 1989, 319). While for audiences the absence of such resonance might result in what Randall Collins (2004, 42) portrays as the mildly anxious boredom of "forced rituals," for performers this lack is felt more personally. Stand-up Heikki Vilja depicts the absence of connection—he even uses the same word—as if he himself was performing in "playback mode," "like a robot that is executing an assigned mission." In this regard, mutual understanding and the affects of rapport and relatability are crucial for stand-ups because they seem to function in part as legitimizing *their own* status as authentic selves rather than "robots," "automatons," or any other mechanical entities which comics invoke when referring to themselves as inauthentic (and thus inadequate as stand-up) performers.

Of course, it would be inexcusable to invoke "mechanics" and awkwardly detached robots in a dissertation that deals with the themes of humor and comedy without also dealing with Henri Bergson. One could begin by noting that as ordinary talk (spontaneous conversation) in extraordinary context (staged performance), as if by definition stand-up seems to balance on the verge of awkwardness (see also Frith 1996, 206). I suggest that this is not only because the extraordinary context can be perceived as representing "something mechanical encrusted upon the living"—the ultimate formula for the phenomenon of comedy classically laid out by Bergson (1935), that is, as something in danger of turning what is organic and vital about stand-up comedy (i.e., spontaneous immediacy) into its opposite, something artificially scripted, forced, or uncanny (see also Grobe 2017, 32; Jay 1998). It is also because by the same gesture, stand-up reveals to us the inherently performative, formal, or artificial nature of our *everyday interactions* (see also Mead 2015; Goffman 1990; Butler 1990). To be precise, it is this double movement or mutual implication between performance and not-performance, ordinary and extraordinary, or one imitating the other that renders stand-up formally ambiguous as well as inherently *comic*. For Alenka Zupančič (2008, 121; see also Dolar 2017), this is the classic comic gesture of imitation, which is inherently double in nature: "it makes us perceive a certain duality where we have so far perceived only a (more or less) harmonious One. It makes perceive this duality simply by reproducing ('imitating') the One as faithfully as possible." Thus, stand-up comedy allows us to see how everyday interaction is *both* spontaneous *and* to a large degree scripted, and how

these aspects mutually implicate rather than oppose each other. Phrased in the idiom of humor studies (see, e.g., Attardo 1994), these aspects are the mutually incongruous categories or scripts that stand-up trades on by definition. In the next chapter, I will look at the implications of this formulation in terms of stage personae as something like doubles of stand-up comics, and stand-up itself as both *performance of self* and *animation of voice*.

As much as through (intentional) mistakes, false starts, and explicit metacommunication where the performer comments on her previous text in an off-the-cuff way, appearance of spontaneous immediacy is attained in stand-up through repetitive rehearsal of seemingly singular stand-up routines (Frith 1996, 220). That is to say, the appearance of spontaneity in discourse is generally afforded by the phenomenon of formulaicity, which is often itself the result of intense repetition. Insofar as formulaicity facilitates the management of the cognitive load during performance, Alison Wray (2017) considers any text formulaic if it is memorized as units or chunks of discourse and reproduced through reduced effort—a criterion that stand-up positively maintains. Depending on the aesthetic valuations or linguistic ideologies one holds dear, formulaicity of discourse and the fact that stand-up routines are scripted and serially rehearsed can be evaluated in a variety of ways: as a conventional aspect of all performances (see, e.g., Schechner 1985), as an aspect of stand-up that renders the whole genre dubious, or through the "camp eye."[33]

Often, stand-ups themselves are the first to suffer the consequences, as Teemu Vesterinen writes: "It pisses me off to perform the same bits from night to night, because once the bit is premiered, its presentation turns into just representation, [that is] acting. That is why I write lots of new material, so that I wouldn't slip into [the mode of being] an automated talking head." Formulaicity and scriptedness are perceived as instigating mediational distance within interaction (while formulaicity is simultaneously not recognized in everyday communication), and spontaneity or digression as their inverses can be perceived as indexing intimacy and laying the grounds for potential interpersonal resonance. However, as Christopher Grobe points out, spontaneity and digression are never valued as such, but always in relation to, and as departures from, fixed conventions or forms. By thus representing unscriptedness within a scripted setting, spontaneous digression "will feel like a *moment of contact*, of access to the comedian himself" (Grobe 2017, 34; italics added).

Lawrence Grossberg (1992, 226) was among the first to argue for affective resonances—or what he called "investments"—as central in how "people authorize

[33] The last of these orientations is characterized by being conscious of the fact that performances base their appeal on what has been labeled the illusion of naturalizing presence (McKenzie 2001), while simultaneously *not* attempting to find anything more profound beneath these illusions (Frith 1996, 215).

and eventually authenticate certain forms of popular culture to speak for them." While one might question his stark conclusion that we have reached a stage of (popular) culture where *only* affective commitments matter, we could perhaps acknowledge stand-up as occasionally manifesting what Grossberg referred to as an "indifference" to meaning (see also Grossberg 1997, 140). That is, stand-up tends to use meaning to get somewhere else, namely, to moral and affective capture (Kavka 2008, 40), not to mention that a good deal of stand-up discourse generally consists of what sociolinguists call "phatic" communication, which foregrounds interpersonal resonance or affective conviviality rather than "information" or "meaning" per se (Senft 1995; Varis & Blommaert 2015).

Something of this discursive rationale is explicitly encapsulated in the common stand-up slogan "only laughs matter" as one of the salient linguistic ideologies of the form, which I will here term *ideology of laughter*. According to this willfully reductionist (and commercial, as some critical voices are eager to point out) ideology, which can be regarded as fairly widespread, the main task of the stand-up comic is to get laughs, plain and simple (see also Motturi & Kurki 2014). While I would hesitate to put too much weight on such decontextualized text-artifacts, it is worth noting that I also encountered this saying in my questionnaire given to Finnish comics, that is, in a much contextualized social interaction. While the slogan might at first sight seem like an obvious preliminary apology for racist and misogynistic bits or hackiest dick jokes, jumping to such conclusions without careful ethnographic contextualization constitutes a basic pitfall of much of the reasoning we like to criticize in other disciplines. Rather than as an ideological stance for freedom of speech (or rather for *freedom of laughter*, and see also Kramer 2011), one could also read and find examples of this slogan being used for merely underlining the fundamental dependency of stand-up on affective resonance.

In short, the emergent communities of stand-up as an affective arrangement can be regarded as loose, porous, and provisional collectives glued together by acts of joint attention and shared moral and affective capture—as much communions of bodies as communions of minds.[34] In particular, stand-ups achieve such captures by cultivating relatability through various forms of allegorical and metonymic naturalization of personal experience, or "fantasies of generality through emotional likeness" (Berlant 2008). Not only does stand-up live off the personal quotidian, as

[34] While perhaps not constitutive of speech communities in the traditional sense of being characterized by "clear and generally shareable rules of the indexical value and function of signs," sociolinguists Varis and Blommaert (2015) point out, "the joint focusing, even if 'phatic', is in itself not trivial, it creates a *structural* level of conviviality, i.e., a sharing at one level of meaningful interaction by means of a joint feature, which in superficial but real ways translates a number of individuals into a focused collective" (for traditional communities, see Agha 2007a).

I elaborate on more fully in Article I, it does so by claiming exemplarity and more-than-personal resonance for the affective particularities that accrue in these seemingly personal realms (see Shuman 2005; Colleary 2015, 52; Wickberg 1998, 15; see also Kavka 2008, xii).[35] In this regard, the collectivities construed by stand-up comics for themselves correspond with what Lauren Berlant has referred to as "intimate publics," which burgeon around an affective identification "among strangers that promises a certain experience of belonging and provides a complex of consolation, confirmation, discipline, and discussion about how to live as an *x*" (Berlant 2008, viii, 6).

However, how are experiences personalized and the personal appropriated on the one hand and rendered intersubjectively relatable on the other hand? This is to say, how do stand-up comics manage themselves as both token selves and type characters, and how does this dialectic between individuality and typicality play out? These are the problems that the next section aims to unlock.

4.2 Trajectory of Becoming-Character

> Around what other genres or art forms does this aesthetic about the tension between difference and repetition, actuality and possibility, and individuation and standardization come to consolidate over the course of the twentieth-century? (Ngai 2012, 140)

Despite emphasis on group experience as its *raison d'être*, stand-up is blatantly individualist in staging a ritually delimited and privileged space for individuals to indulge in public self-reflection and introspection. I have chosen to dedicate my attention in this section to the mutually related ideals of individuality and authentic self-presence at the heart of Anglo-American (as well as more broadly Westernized) stand-up. Indeed, much ink has been spilled in research over the *stage personae* through which stand-ups publicly present themselves. For my part, I proceed by acknowledging the genre as a continuum from *performance of self* to *animation of voice*, where movement along this continuum (as what I call a trajectory of

[35] The idea of the personal comic quotidian—that stand-ups would and should be able to extract comic insights from anywhere—is also symptomatically reflected in mediatized stand-up competitions. In the Finnish version of the British *Show Me the Funny*, called *Naurun tasapaino* (loosely translated as "The Balance of Laughter," comprising three seasons from 2013–2015), competitors and aspiring stand-ups are introduced to various working communities, horse races, etc., in order to perform for these communities with a limited amount of time to prepare for their sets. One could thus draw two practical (as well as normative) implications from the show: a stand-up comic has to 1) be able to fluently adapt oneself to different social and spatial environments, and 2) be fast at writing new material.

becoming-character) corresponds with an increase of mediational distance in self-presentation. Here I build on Articles I and IV, where I look in more detail how stand-up comics alternate between different modes of narration. However, I want to here look at more broadly how stand-up figures its subjects (i.e., stand-up comics) as *individual type characters*, being both token individuals and recognizable types. This is something that I trace to the Western concept of sense of humor as a central orienting framework embedded in discourses on comedy.

I would like to begin by situating stand-up comedy in the context of what David P. Marshall has elaborated as contemporary "presentational culture" characterized by novel intersections of selves, self-presentations, and publics through digital networks and social media (in contrast to "representational culture" emblematically manifested by television and film). According to an emergent field of "persona studies" spearheaded by Marshall himself, such a proliferation of public presentations of the self as increasingly valued commodities calls for an extensive analysis of the general deployment of personae across contemporary culture (Barbour, Marshall & Moore 2014). In somewhat congruent terms, Shunsuke Nozawa (2013) diagnoses the ecology—and, one could add, economy—of contemporary media as penetrated by a modality and ideology of semiosis called "characterization," or *becoming-character* ("transformation of some thing into a character"). According to Nozawa, not only do contemporary people encounter myriads of characters through genres of communication, ranging from street signs and smartphones to anime, they increasingly experience *themselves* as transforming into—or are encouraged to produce themselves into commercially profitable—characters on the various platforms on which they present themselves for others (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, YouTube). By drawing from Marshall's and Nozawa's insights into the nature of characterization in contemporary culture, I am interested in finding out how (and to what extent) stand-up comedy, as another salient genre of playful performance of personae, might be argued as partaking in such trends and cultural currents.

To start with, the crafting and fashioning of a distinctive stage persona is generally regarded as the number-one goal for aspiring stand-ups, as emphasized in courses and manuals of the genre. When questioned about stage personae, however, some comics (including those who completed my questionnaire) are quick to point out that, in fact, they do *not* "have" stage personae. Such comics generally contend that they are "themselves" onstage, plain and simple. Relatedly, it is not uncommon for stand-ups to differentiate between stage persona and offstage identity *in favor* of the former. Stand-ups may feel that the way in which comedy allows them to present and develop themselves can reflect their perceptions of who they are more truthfully than everyday life. Norwegian stand-up Daniel Simonsen opines that the stage somehow brings people to life in a way would not be possible otherwise, that they

are able to present a side of themselves that they maybe struggle with showing out in the real world (personal communication). Or consider how Joni Koivuniemi speaks of stand-up comedy in terms of a "personal journey" that is intimately concerned with "where you come from, how, and why." (See also Motturi & Peltola 2014.)

However, it is one of the paradoxes of authenticity (understood as self-presence and truthfulness to this self-presence *for the sake of self*; see Wilce 2014, 83; Trilling 1972) that it has to be performed through perceivable signs, just as the next mode of self-presentation. Once marked and rendered perceivable in performance (for instance, through tactics of hiding or emphasizing the gap between person and persona, as Barker and Taylor 2007 point out), authenticity is an integral aspect of stand-up comedy because it correlates with far-reaching aesthetic, normative, and moral standards, or even with different genres and styles of cultural expression. Indeed, a central feature of popular culture is seen to be the tendency to equate authenticity with artistic integrity, and stand-up is no different in this regard (Guignon 2004; Barker & Taylor 2007; Haapoja 2017; Lindholm 2008; Speers 2017; Anttonen 2017).[36]

Theater scholar Susanne Colleary (2015, 55) characterizes the "comic persona" in stand-up as a device and construct that operates as mediation or "connecting tissue" between the comic and audience by defining their mutual relations. Subsequently, however, this vehicle is described as one through which aspects or fragments of the "self" are projected onto the stand-up stage. What we might take from Colleary's characterization, and what is also reflected in stand-up comics' own views, is that the stand-up stage persona is understood as *both* an artificial tool *and* vehicle through which to express—and *explore*, I would add—one's self. Comparable to *personae* as masks worn by dramatic actors in classical antiquity, stand-up stage personae are "speech-trumpets" through which it is possible to amplify, express, and transform one's voice in a balancing act between personation and impersonation, or concealment and revelation (Rée 1990, 1054; see also Iser 1990).

To summarize, stage personae in stand-up are generally conceptualized and spoken of in terms of a specific persona's relation to or distance from one's offstage identity, or in terms of a distinctive perspective on the world (or "attitude"; see, e.g., Allen 2002; Carter 2001). While the first option leads to the problem of sincerity or

[36] Under the specific constraints of the form, stand-ups sometimes need to take unusual routes for indicating sincerity, such as through an inability to speak (e.g., by shouting), through a contradiction between the glibness of one's words and an uncertain or ironic performance, or in general by taking language to its limits in terms of form, style, content, or function (Frith 1996, 168). As we know, sometimes sincerity is merely a function of how "dangerous" a particular utterance is deemed (see Ross 2008).

authenticity, the latter option might be said to lead to the problem of individuality (with its conceptual burdens and categorical exclusions; see Cronin 2000). I will next look at the implications of these perspectives in terms of stand-up comics as both subject and objects.

As expounded upon more fully in Article I, stand-ups aim at being both unique, token individuals and recognizable type characters. They are encouraged to discover and cultivate their individual or most defined characteristics through what John Limon has referred to as "self-typecasting."[37] An example of self-typecasting is found in Jim Gaffigan (2017) presenting himself as a "fat guy," willfully subjecting himself as a representative of this group and proceeding to address various issues faced by "fat guys"; alternatively, it is seen in how Maz Jobrani (2017) labels his comedy special as simply *Immigrant*. Self-typecasting in this manner allows stand-up comics to reduce themselves to a type character and an interpretative framework against and within which to further develop, stylize, and fine-tune their persona. Most importantly, in cases when one is coercively and frequently reduced to a "type" and negatively stereotyped *from without* (that is, by one's peers through any pejorative slur one might think of), such explicit self-typecasting allows one to reappropriate and resignify one's public character, and even wear such type categories as cherished emblems, perhaps to (temporarily) co-opt them from perpetrators (for reappropriation of stereotypes, see Pickering 2001; see also Lockyer & Pickering 2005; for a classic treatment of "strategic essentialism," see Spivak 1988).

Insofar as characters and characteristics are thus rigidly attributed and fixed upon others' personae (see also Nozawa 2013), stand-up can be said to allow (or even encourage) a reappropriation of such characterological fixity. Finnish stand-up Anna Rimpelä provides an exemplary description of the implications of learning about aspects of her outer appearance in terms of her comedy:

> Someone once said that I seem like a religion teacher. I got so much information and ideas out of that, in terms of which way to go [and] what is interesting about myself. That clarified my craft for me, so that, fine, if people see me as

[37] Drawing the Western contours within which the character and shaping of individual identities is generally talked about, Kwame Anthony Appiah (2007) distinguishes between the romanticist position that accords selves with authentic identities to be *discovered* (rather than created), and the existentialist position that accords them with limitless capacities for self-creation. Neither are individuals free to construct their self-narratives in isolation of structural, social, cultural, and moral constraints, however, nor are their characters as fixed as the romanticist position would imply, like Appiah points out. (See also Langellier 1999.)

> resembling a religion teacher, how could I use that for my benefit or fight against it?

For me, Rimpelä's words illuminate how both personal and social life are derived from—and how stand-up draws to the center of attention—the ability to imagine oneself *as others see one*. (See also Lindfors 2019.) As moments of seeing oneself as others see one, our consciousness of others' perspectives sustains our sense of performing in and having an effect on the world in general. Being oneself thus always presumes an audience (Kavka 2008, 97), for and in relation to which one decides to be oneself. We are, in a very real sense, dependent on acts of intersubjective—if not Althusserian—interpellation, against which there is no protection, as Judith Butler (1997, 26) points out.

Importantly, there is always a gap between these two fundamental perspectives. Simon Frith (1996, 206) puts it best: "In our experience (or imagination) of our own bodies, that is to say, there is always a gap between what is meant (the body directed from the inside) and what is read (the body interpreted from the outside); and this gap is a continual source of anxiety, an anxiety not so much that the body itself but its meaning is out of our control." At least in Western cultures, it is a truism if not triviality that we wish to have some control over how we project ourselves outward, and that we can often feel quite anxious about such things. Accordingly, it is this gap that stand-up comics learn to manage through identification and verbalization of their most salient or emblematic indices. This is because such indices tend to draw attention to themselves, or as Paul Kockelman (2013, 94–95) glosses, a highly emblematic index, such as a uniform, insures that actors and observers are both aware of the index in question and also intersubjectively aware of this awareness. In stand-up, however, such intersubjective meta-awareness can be distracting, as known by Harri Soinila, who wears a cowboy hat onstage and feels obliged to explicitly address it in his performances. (See also Lindfors 2019.) On occasion, such indices can be temporary—and even undesirable and unpleasant—as exemplified by Heikki Vilja's explanation that when going onstage with back pains, he feels "it is mandatory to say this to the audience."

To reiterate, stand-up comics learn to appropriate and in performance make use of their most defined, defining, or conspicuous characteristics—or perhaps those characteristics that are purposefully stylized as conspicuous. True to the genre, such characteristics are typically developed and exaggerated to outrageous proportions, many comics describing their stage personae as exaggerated or reduced versions of themselves. For instance, whereas Heikki Vilja characterizes his stage persona as "two-dimensional," or as a "reduction of everything unnecessary," Joni Koivuniemi describes stand-up comics "turning into a cartoon that one can count on." He explains, "When they [the audience] know how you behave in your world, you don't

need to explain everything." Indeed, in stand-up it is most imperative that one's stage persona is performed in an intertextually and cross-contextually unified and consistent manner—all of which does not preclude developing and changing one's comic persona over time (see also Keisalo 2018a).

In short, stand-up comics sometimes feel like two-dimensional cartoon characters. Another paradox that stand-up seems to exhibit is that being a recognizable "character" simultaneously implies that one is both a unique personality and also somehow "typical," or at least an "intersection" of abstract typical traits (Fishelov 1990). Put otherwise, one generally performs one's individuality through one's most defined—which is to say, most *typical*—characteristics. Perhaps such characteristics selected by stand-up comics about themselves could be described as "extimate," in the sense that Slavoj Žižek (1999, 117) defines extimacy as "the irreducible trace of externality in the very midst of 'internality'." Extimate objects and extimacy as part of ourselves are thus at once something both external and intimate, being "that which we experience, ambivalently, as part of the world that confronts us and yet at the same time as something that is palpably, intensely, at the very core of our sense of ourselves" (Mazzarella 2017, 4). This is the dialectical tension of stand-up—the extimate that stand-up stages—between individuality and typicality, subjectivity and objectivity (for an excellent treatment of the identity politics of contemporary British stand-up, see Quirk 2018).

Curiously, this is also an accurate description of what it means to "individuate" oneself through *(sense of) humor*.[38] In his history of the concept, Daniel Wickberg (1998, 5) contends that sense of humor stages subjectivity and objectivity in a dialectic that revolves "around the status of the self and personhood," claiming furthermore that "humor has always been about the ontological status of persons, about persons both as things and as more than things" (see also Hill 1993; Parvulescu 2010). That is to say, one's sense of humor is perceived as revealing something quite essential about ourselves as both unique individuals and objective characters. Being as much something through which we individuate and distinguish ourselves vis-á-

[38] Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai (2017, 242) suggest that it is more upsetting when our capacities or proclivities for humorous pleasure are questioned, compared to when our empathetic qualities are pressured: "If we have conflicting views of what should produce empathy, if we don't finally feel it for the same things, we can find each other shallow and prefer ourselves—but it's different to disrespect what gives someone pleasure as funny. […] It may be that we hold our pleasures closer than our ethics." According to these authors, insofar as humor involves surprise, freedom, and spontaneity, its contestation is taken more personally. It is "experienced as shaming; as condescending; as diminishing," which certainly resonates well with how stand-up comics depict failed stand-up gigs (or "deaths" on stage) as giving rise to endless self-flagellation.

vis others, the sense of humor seems to be about objective character, and something that designates our type—after all, comedy is traditionally perceived as trading on types, generalities, and repetition (Dolar 2017, 585; Zupančič 2008; Sills 2016). In stand-up, this tension is further exacerbated by a "structural" feature of stand-up clubs that conventionally present stand-ups in a serial fashion, one after another, with each attempting to distinguish oneself from the rest as *interesting* (see also Marshall 2014; for the aesthetics of "interesting" as "bearing appropriate difference from type," see Ngai 2012, 24). The ratio of interest in a comic could be described, then, as the relation between the time we are willing to actively invest in listening to someone and the "profit" (of pleasure, insight, or whatever) we receive in the process.

Next, I want to acknowledge and elaborate on stand-up as a continuum between the poles of performance of self and animation of voice (a dichotomy that recalls the classical distinction between showing [*mimesis*] and telling [*diegesis*]; Booth 1978; see also Article III). Whereas selves are paradigmatically performed, and an integral aspect of stand-up might be said to boil down to a performance of self, voices are *animated* by granting them life force (for "performance" and "animation" as diverging analytical tropes, see Silvio 2010; Manning & Gershon 2013; see also Bogatyrev 1983). After all, it is a characteristic—if not defining—feature of stand-up comics to evoke and animate before us situations populated by characters, figures, and social types, some of them biographically identifiable and anthropomorphic, others non-human or even abstract concepts. Indeed, masters of the form are depicted as embodying entire cavalcades of such voices (see Saul 2014, 3); it is also no coincidence that at such moments stand-up can be described as especially "animated" or "cartoonish."

The continuum between performance of self and animation of voice serves as a heuristic for exploring aspects of stand-up on a scale from mimetic embodiment of self to relatively more mediated forms of personation and impersonation. In other words, these are perspectives or interpretative frameworks by means of which to conceptualize something essential about stand-up comedy, and not so much definitions as invitations.

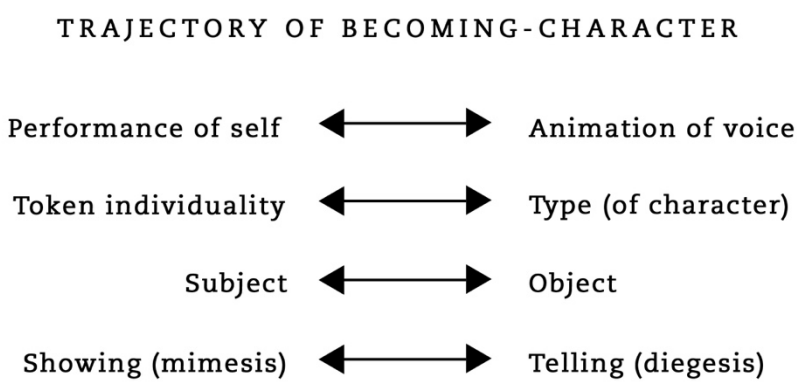

Figure 3. Trajectory of Becoming-Character. (Design by Saana ja Olli.)

On one end of the continuum, often associated what could be characterized as an ideology of *comic truth*, stand-up comedy is perceived as affording authentic self-expression and self-discovery to the point that it is an explicit ethical imperative of many stand-up comics to "speak their own truth." The cherished notions on this end of the continuum are constituted by the infamous touchstones of Western Enlightenment and rationalism: self, subject, individuality, identity, mimesis. It is here that stand-up possibly intersects with what Anne M. Cronin (2000, 275) describes as the "compulsory individuality" of contemporary Western consumerism. For Cronin, the ideology of compulsory individuality frames the discovery and free expression of oneself as the ultimate goals of selfhood, which one can pursue by *being true to one's individual identity*. In this framework, each individual is granted "potential," the realization of which as a form of self-actualization becomes a duty in the imperative to live one's life "authentically" (Taylor 1994, 78, cited in Cronin 2000, 275; see also Trilling 1972). Within the logic of "self as project," the authentic self is both something to be aimed at (in the future) and something that already exists but has to be discovered (Cronin 2000, 276)—which also happens to characterize the identity politics at the heart of confessionalist art forms such as stand-up in general (see Grobe 2017, Preface).

Coincidentally, what appears at first here to be mere descriptions of individual stand-up comics (who might fall on either side, "performing one's self" or "animating voices") turns out to disclose implicit theoretical assumptions and frameworks of analysis. What I am suggesting, therefore, is that this continuum can be adopted as a methodological tool for modeling and making sense of empirical reality—in this case, various stand-up performances—but at the same it is itself

firmly rooted in empirical data as well as in the theoretical foreknowledge that I accumulated while engaged in this study. That is, the model can be said as hovering between bottom-up induction and formal deduction, simultaneously questioning any simple causality between empirical encounter and theoretical reflection, as any study that abides by the "probabilistic" abductive method should (see Keane 2018, 83; see also Chapter 2.1).

I am referring to the fact that the paradigm of *performance* with its implications of mimetic embodiment and expression of the self tends to work on a hierarchical scale from inauthentic acting (or acting out) to authentic disclosure of identity, where the route from the former to the latter can be valued as only the end result of considerable labor (Silvio 2010; Nozawa 2013). For instance, Adi Hastings and Paul Manning (2004, 296–297 and footnotes) argue that an uncritical foregrounding of this end result runs the risk of reductively aligning speech, speakers, and selves, obscuring the fact that self-identities always depend on alterities. In particular, privileging performance and self-expression (or its performative transgression) as one's orienting perspectives tends to reduce "all of the Jakobsonian functions (Jakobson, 1960) of language to just two, the referential set toward the object and the expressive set toward the speaking subject." In so doing, this perspective also appears to inevitably concern the adequacy of signs in terms of *truth value* (as the criterion for referential adequacy) or *authenticity* (as the criterion for expressive adequacy). (See also Cavarero 2005; Silvio 2010, 423; Frith 1996, 210; Savolainen 2018.) Not only is this perspective thus potentially reductive, it seems to adopt its overarching terms from the popular cultural target that it is supposed to critically engage.

At the other end of the continuum, stand-up can be framed as an animation of reflexively calibrated voices or, to take the confrontational nature of this genre into account, as a staging of voices into clashes with each other (Hill 1995; Coleman 2004; Keane 2010; 2016, 168). Voices are less or more stabilized "material embodiments of social ideology and experience" (Feld et al. 2004, 332), whose defining feature is that they change as they enter into dialogue with others: "So a voice represents not just a static social role, but a 'whole person' or an 'integral point of view' who speaks from some position but is not fully defined by that position" (Wortham 2001, 38–40, citing Bakhtin 1984, 93; see also Lempert 2006, 17–18; Urban & Smith 1998, 265).[39] In contrast with "selves" and "subjectivities" that bear

[39] Voices are not reducible to subjects or language; vice versa, subjects are not reducible to voices. Fred Evans (2009, 145) calls the relation between subject and voice "an elliptical identity," so that socially circulating dialogic voices are always "excessive," beyond full control, and only partly available for accommodation. Something of the anonymity of voices becomes us, and a part of us becomes part of these voices. Further

the mark of (psychologized) interiorities, the animation of voice orients one's analysis toward an inherently social and positional framework, where the human self is secured its place as only a "meeting point of its manifold roles" (Iser 1990, 948; for the interdisciplinary traction of "voice," see Schäfers 2017; Couldry 2010).

Moreover, the perspective of voice foregrounds how stand-up comics reflexively engage with aspects of their own voices. Comics' voices can thus become decoupled from one's self and identity and rendered into generic types amongst a fluid plurality of other voices, functioning as resources or elements for performance rather than necessarily in the service of self-expression. And is this not what stand-up comics do all the time, playing with what appear to be very intimate aspects of themselves in a manner that turns them into more or less objectified type figures?

Indeed, while potentially a source of anxiety, the gap inevitably opened up between oneself and the voices one adopts in order to communicate is also the constitutive space of play. Oftentimes, it is only out of practical reasons that some of the voices of our repertoire are treated as unmarked, "natural" ones while others are complementarily deemed more or less "not me," "Other," or "funny." Jonathan Rée (1990, 1053) asserts that in such moments, "You glimpse the possibility that it is quite arbitrary to try to mark off certain of your vocal performances and nominate them as one voice, the voice that really belongs to you: do you really possess an ownmost, innermost voice which has the power to clamp quotation marks round the others and shrug them off as 'funny'?" (See also Auslander 2006, 192.)

To summarize, the continuum from performance of self toward animation of voice, which I have called the *trajectory of becoming-character* in stand-up, corresponds with movement toward more mediated and potentially more objectified modes of communication and presentation of the self. In particular, as more mediated, these modes also mark an increasingly reflexive relationship and orientation of the stand-up comic with regard to voices in general, including the voice she has adopted and stylized as her own.

The study of stand-up contributes to the topic of public personae in contemporary culture by shedding light on these personae as increasingly mediated and self-reflexive, while simultaneously affording important tools for ethical self-discovery. In turning themselves "into cartoons that one can count on", stand-up comics reveal to us our predicament marked by frantic self-branding—as something we all seem to do in an increasing manner—where one is gently coerced into capitalizing on one's "personality", with all the value-laden tensions related to individuality and typicality that this sort of compulsory identity predicament drives one into. Further still, revealing mediation, individuality, typicality, and reflexivity

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still, we recognize ourselves only as parts of voices, which means that we are always "more" than what we are capable of explicitly articulating.

as pronounced aspects of contemporary public personae exposes the gap between one's self and the material-discursive, as well as inevitably social forms through which this self has to express and mediate itself (Bakhtin 1981; 1984). Stand-up does not resolve this fundamental paradox but rather hovers on top of it, milking it for laughs—and then some.

5. Scales of Form

This chapter approaches the node of stand-up routines from the perspective of textuality and poetics. Textuality and poetics are concerns that have dominated my earlier articles on stand-up as embodied verbal art (i.e., Articles III and IV within the present dissertation). This chapter, then, can be read as an introduction to those pieces in particular. The first section of the chapter takes a look at stand-up routines as the predominant texts manifesting this genre, while the second attempts to unveil their nature as "complex concoctions of metaphor and elaborate parallelism" (Wilce 2014, 78). That is to say, while textuality—understood here as a general function of all modalities of sign behavior, not something to be found only in verbal communication—is the perspective of the first section, the perspective of poetics dominates the second section.

In order to get a glimpse of the "poetic" qualities of stand-up, one only has to recall how often rhythm, punctuation, or simply "timing" are invoked as *the* most important qualities of comedy (Berlant & Ngai 2017, 237–238). My approach to poetics in stand-up does not necessarily proceed through such paralinguistics but rather more broadly through sensory patterning constituted by various modes of repetition and contrast (see also Noyes 2016a, 132, 134). In particular, I take into account that poetics always *does* something within its respective genre—it bears *semiotic impact*. As apprehended through its Ancient Greek roots (*poiesis*, ποίησις), poetics implies productive or creative action; it is a mode of performativity and thus also of interaction (Fleming & Lempert 2010; Lindfors 2017a). However, what are stand-up routines within which this poetics manifests itself, and how do they travel (e.g., Urban 2001; 2018)? Or, to pose the same question more intriguingly, how does stand-up comedy *routinize* experience?

5.1 Routinization of Experience

Perhaps one could start by crudely dividing the broad diversity of stand-up comics into raconteurs and punsters. That is to say, and to *really* simplify matters, stand-ups either tell stories or deliver puns, one after another. Translated into textual terms, a fundamental axis of stand-up moves on the scale of entextualization that individual

units of expression manifest, where seemingly free-flowing conversational discourse (often spliced with embedded narratives) at one end is contrasted with highly condensed and atomized forms of text, such as jokes and puns, at the other extreme (see also Brodie 2008). Whereas narratives might be characterized as expansive, concerned with the detailing of particularities, the joke has been characterized as "contractive, concerned with abstraction, detachment, formal condensation of meaning, and the mechanistic interchangeability of parts" (Wickberg 1998, 9–10).[40] Given that "real people" generally talk about actual issues that seem to have a bearing on their lives (and probably not through endless puns and chronotopically distant jokes populated by universal social types; see also Agha 2007b, 330), positioning oneself on this impressionistic continuum of entextualization affords considerable variation in terms of expression, interaction, and stage personae. Indeed, it can be designated as an act of identifying oneself as a stand-up comic.

In his stand-up special *3 Mics*, Neal Brennan (2017) complicates matters somewhat by playing with three different microphones, one for each style or theme that he enacts: 1) "one-liners," 2) "emotional stuff," and 3) "stand-up." In a symptomatic fashion, while his "one-liner" section literally consists of one-liners and his "emotional stuff" is heavily confessional monologue on having violent parents, depression, and self-anxiety, his "stand-up" section consists of distinctly conversational (as well as good-spirited and "airy," in comparison with the other two) pieces that occasionally delve into the absurd. What I am trying to say is that Brennan's "stand-up" section is distinguished from the other two in consisting of recognizable *stand-up routines*.

Often referred to as the "numbers" or "songs" of stand-up comic's repertoire—and here one might recall that stand-up specials are eligible for awards at the Grammys, not at the Oscars—stand-up routines can be described as semantically coherent and formally cohesive units of interaction mediated by and mediating stand-up comedy. As folklorists and linguistic anthropologists would be wont to say, if stand-up is the genre, routines are the texts through which it takes form. Routines or simply "bits" are also metadiscursively reified by practitioners of stand-up themselves, which could be read as a symptomatic cue for a simultaneous reifying of the boundary between communicative practice and "art." Although formally and thematically diverse (ranging from topical and deeply personal to absurdist), routines typically express an experience or perception (no matter how banal or extraordinary), thought process (no matter how convoluted or absurd), argument (no matter how

[40] Additionally, the proportion of quotable component in comparison to the work as a whole also varies between narratives and jokes, which has an effect on how aggressively copyright protected these units might be (see Ngai 2015, 4; Abramovitch 2015). For joke theft in stand-up and the communities of stand-ups as "informal norm-based property regulatory systems," see Oliar and Sprigman 2011.

preposterous or exaggerated), or attitude (no matter how irreverent or eccentric) (see also Carter 2001).

Indeed, the concept of genre has provided folklore studies and linguistic anthropogy with a unified framework for examining convergences and overlaps between formal and functional features of meaningful text (Shuman & Hasan-Rokem 2012; Noyes 2016a, 132). Genres can be heuristically described as "aesthetic structures of affective expectation" (Berlant 2008, 4) or, in more analytic terms, as corresponding to forms, contents, and metapragmatic knowledge concerning the uses of these forms and contents in practice (Frog 2016, 58; Frog et al. 2016). While the first approach guided the previous chapter on stand-up as an economy of relatability, the second perspective unveils stand-up as a mixture of various genres of discursive interaction, where genres and their metapragmatic norms are objectified for (typically) humorous purposes.

Susanne Colleary (2015, 49) interprets routines or "material" in stand-up in a Schechnerian manner as "strips of living behavior reconstructed or rearranged, elaborated or distorted and independent of the causal systems that made them." What I find missing from the above characterization is the fact that stand-up routines are intimate in the sense of being organically associated with their authors (as selves) and animators (as personae). However, they also need to be allegorical in the sense of making the implicit (and sometimes explicit) claim for interpersonal resonance and convoking strangers to assemble around them (Noyes 2016b, 133). "Has anyone ever…?" might be one of the hackiest openings for a stand-up routine ever, but as such it is also most revealing in terms of how stand-ups produce audiences by characterizing their own spaces of consumption (Warner 2002, 71; see also Article I).

In general, when storytelling becomes associated with the autobiographical or confessional, it runs the risk of becoming ordinary or banal. Perceived as failing to transcend the personal, instead of rising to the level of art we say it remains merely "anecdotal" (Shuman 2005, 7). Yet, Christopher Grobe (2017, Preface) points out that this is precisely what confessional artists aim at, for it is the art of the *artless* personal quotidian, the realm of the "uneventful" (Cavell 1996), that is their object. They do so by producing something referred to by Grobe (2017, 26) as "collections of life-vignettes," which, while often autobiographical, cannot be really described as autobiographical narratives per se. For autobiographical narratives, stand-up is way too fictionalized; at most, it could be said to bear a resemblance to the literary genre of autofiction, where protagonist and author correspond with each other but the fictional qualities of narrative are simultaneously foregrounded (see Savolainen 2016, 213, 225n14). These vignettes, such as the bits and routines of stand-up comics, are rather glimpses of everyday perceptions, affects, and thought processes, the significance of which resides not in the vignettes themselves but in their mutual

implications, the "grander order" that might be here taken as representing the stand-up comic as both self and persona. Indeed, as much as personal narratives, stand-up routines might be referred to as *persona* narratives (see Vahlo 2018).

Rather than "strips of living behavior," I prefer to characterize stand-up routines as interactional re-enactments of everyday experience. In this regard, I find it appropriate to zero in on the term "routine" as implying what I here call *routinization of experience*, being something that is closely linked with what Lauren Berlant has called the "exemplification" of one's everyday life. Routinization of experience for a public is underlined by an assumption of shared emotions and cultural forms, which precedes, creates, and ultimately renders such publics ambiguous and anxious (Berlant & Prosser 2011, 180). Routinization of experience, then, refers here to the process of transforming one's experiences and perceptions into stand-up routines, or more generally to the process of objectifying and eventalizing one's experiences into repeatable and shareable forms.

Routinization of experience carries implications of ossification and fixedness—after all, routines also imply convention and habit. In transforming their everyday experiences into bits and routines—that is, in externalizing their experiences in poetic form—stand-up comics might be said to run the risk of what Danille Elise Christensen (2011, 193) broadly refers to as self-exhibiting reflexive materializations. That is to say, in claiming the right to structure and finalize perceptions of oneself (or one's culture and community more broadly) in the course of publicly entextualizing one's experiences, reflexive forms such as stand-up routines also claim the right to dramatize, regulate, and reorganize the previously "given" order of things. In this sense, self-exhibiting reflexive materializations are double-edged swords; given enough repetitions, the production and public performance of such forms entail a risk of "transforming one's experience of experience": "One can start to feel that intangibles become real only after, or if, they are represented." (Christensen 2011, 193.) I take this as a personal or professional predicament more broadly faced by those whose work involves attention and constructing personae, such as online bloggers and other public influencers. Further still, comparable to blog posts, news, rumors, reality television, and even sports, stand-up is a temporally restricted genre: stand-up routines are considered meaningful within a certain zone of immediacy or time frame defined by currency (Shuman 2005, 75; Kavka 2008, 17–18; Abrahams 2005). This means that stand-up comics generally need to keep revising and reinventing their public self-presentations through further externalizations of experience— basically updating their sets on a regular basis.

At the same time, there is something exhilarating or possibly even *ecstatic* in externalizing one's experience in perceivable forms, perhaps because in doing so one is able to detach oneself from these forms (see also Seizer 2017). The stand-up comic

Anitta describes this experience in terms of how when doing stand-up "you can somehow distance yourself from your experience, so that you do not necessarily feel you are talking about yourself in the first place, even though you are." In externalizing one's experience, one reaches beyond oneself, "yet not in order to transcend oneself, but to become available for oneself" (Iser 1990, 945, 952).

To the extent that stand-up is actually therapeutic, it could be argued as being therapeutic (at least) in the sense that it allows one to continually reinvent oneself through objectified forms in the context of heightened—and hopefully affirming—intersubjective contact. Inasmuch as it is true that "we are the stories we tell about ourselves," or more generally that bodies take the shape of the habits and tendencies that they repeatedly enact (Ahmed 2006, 130), stand-up allows one to formulate such stories, habits, and tendencies into crystallized forms ("routines") through intense reiteration in actual social interaction. Hannah Gadsby explains that performing her *Nanette* was not exactly therapeutic, "because it's so [expletive] hard to do." And yet, she admits, "But overall it began to hold… Some other people were holding my pain, and I've never had that. I've *never* had that. And that has done a lot of healing, I think" (Ryzik 2018).

Performing stand-up is like driving a car: both can be properly—and exclusively—practiced in a *live* situation with other actors; both subscribe to the Deweyan pedagogic notion of "learning by doing," although whereas this experiential pedagody is formal and institutionalized when it comes to motoring, in stand-up it is largely informal and communal (see Vilja 2018). Coincidentally, rather than being literary objects able to be analyzed through transliterations, stand-up routines are oratorical artworks and speech acts to be analyzed in terms of performance interaction. Resembling more what Matt Tomlinson (2017) has characterized as dialogically crafted monologue, routines have to be considered in terms of the persuasive and direct relationship between performer and audience (also Goltz 2015). Not only are stand-up routines flat when transcribed in written form, by the same token they are almost inevitably less funny without the performing context—such as, almost by definition, in every journalistic article on stand-up where sequences of stand-up are transcribed so as to provide a glimmer of the allure of real stand-up. To paraphrase Simon Frith (1996, 158, 166), stand-up performances do not exist in order to convey the meaning of the words and texts as such; rather, these words and texts exist in order to convey the meaning of the performance.

Stand-up has been said to prove the idiom of the "telling is the tale" (see, e.g., Lee 2010) insofar as the singular act of performance by a recognized comic is itself often interesting enough: one is yet again rewarded by the affectively resonant event and the intricacies of performance—given that the bit is good. Indeed, it would be quite difficult to argue for repetition or recognition-of-the-same as anyhow inhibiting or diminishing laughter. Stand-up routines endure and hold up to repeated

consumption—I have seen or heard my favorite stand-up bits dozens of times and still laugh at them—which is a feature that is usually reserved for only high-quality art (see also Oring 2016, Chapter 12). This is also the place where I cannot but point out that while jokes, or stand-up by implication, might not be "art" for certain scholars (Carroll 2003) or even for stand-up comics themselves (see, e.g., the quote by Norm MacDonald in Chapter 4.1), they can be certainly included in that category by many folklorists insofar as these communicative forms exhibit what we like to call *vernacular aesthetics* (Oring 2016, 199; see also Lintott 2017). Indeed, many people would probably agree that jokes merit aesthetic evaluation; at least this is something that people do very often.

Considering (vernacular) aesthetics, part of the pleasure of stand-up is simply about observing the cleverness or inventiveness—or, should we say, *beauty*—invested and manifested by stand-up routines in interlocking words and gestures in a manner that "sounds and means right" (Frith 1996, 173). Indeed, one should not underestimate the affect of astonishment that stand-ups sometimes evoke through technical skill, interactional swiftness, or sheer honesty. It is not uncommon to hear stand-ups being assessed by phrases such as "How can they do that?" Here stand-up is celebrated as artifice, skill, and craft, as something that must be learned in and as a practice. This does not obviate celebrating it as creative self-expression. On the contrary, as aestheticized speech, stand-up is probably more rule-governed than ordinary vernacular forms of talk, but due to this self-consciousness it can be also regarded as more revealing of our sense of selves—as more self-expressive (Frith 1996, 220; see also Faubion 2018, 174). Craft merely implies engagement with one's objects and materials. Or, as Richard Sennett (2009, 20) puts it, "The craftsman represents the special human condition of being engaged." (See also Candea et al. 2015.) Stand-up comics are craftsmen and women who selectively use their tools—words and movement, but also thoughts and perceptions—to realize the desired goal, that is, laughter.

I feel I must also address something that I have found quite striking in stand-up, namely, how often the subject and topic of stand-up seems to be simply stand-up itself, in a sort of turning-back-onto-itself-of-genre. While the reiterated nature of stand-up routines is typically effaced in performance, stand-ups refer *all the time* to their work (their past, present, and forthcoming routines and gigs), to other stand-ups (see Graves 2018 for a case with particularly wide-reaching moral ramifications), to stand-up itself, or to purportedly factual encounters with their fans (see, e.g., Birbiglia 2017.) Such metapoetic discourse—which functions as fully poetic and pragmatic in performance no less—renders stand-up inherently self-indulgent, self-referential, and self-explanatory. This is the case to such a large extent that I find it important here to briefly address such metapoetic qualities of stand-up routines (for metapoetics, see Tarkka 2013, Chapter V).

In particular, I would argue that the intertextual and self-referential self-indulgence of stand-up is an integral aspect of the communal pleasure attached to and generated by this culturally devalued genre. In highly resonant terms with regard to stand-up comedy, Misha Kavka (2008, 48) argues that the low status or even potential shame associated with reality television (and stand-up)—leading people to feel ashamed of their interest in those genres, at least in the eyes of those who do not appreciate them—has not inhibited but rather fostered or enhanced the communal intimacy associated with the genre. Stand-up comedy still needs cultural validation in many social forums, and this is done by stand-ups in the manner that they know best: through humor. In short, self-referential self-indulgence itself produces the pleasure of enjoying the genre. Accordingly, this pleasure can be described as second-order pleasure: one finds pleasure *in finding pleasure in stand-up comedy*. Such pleasure, I argue, participates in creating the identities of stand-up consumers, comics, and stand-up itself. In this sense, it is also functional in producing stand-up audiences (see Warner 2002, 70).

Let us close this section with the beautiful metapoetic *hommage* to "jokes" provided by Neal Brennan at the end of his special:

> Sometimes the world can feel like a room that's filling up with water. [Lifts up both hands to indicate the water level.] And for me, to be able to think of a joke is like an air bubble. [Takes two quick inhalations of air, as if still able to breathe.] And I can take the oxygen I get into my lungs, and it can carry me forward. Things can be overwhelming and scary and hurtful, but thankfully my brain can descramble things and form a joke. Like, just for one second, things slow down, and I can win. Like, I can beat life. It's the best. And it's so personal. And it's something I'm so grateful for. Jokes.

In the metapoetic image of Brennan, jokes are the oxygen in a world that is drowning us. We are offered a brief moment to collectively meditate on—and appreciate—the communicative form of the joke as the emblematic metonymic unit of stand-up comedy (on the term "joke" amidst stand-ups, see Brodie 2014). What I find important is that this meditation on jokes, humor, and stand-up is embedded in the performance itself rather than relegated to the role of extradiegetic paratext (Genette 1997).

Brennan describes jokes as performing their function as "oxygen" by affording a "descrambling" and subsequent reformation of the brain. Humor scholar and folklorist Elliot Oring (1992; 2003; 2016) has named this descrambling and reformation as "appropriate incongruity," where two incongruous elements are magically also congruent with each other. In the final section, I will consider Oring's formulation in terms of how stand-up makes use of poetic parallelism as one of its central organizing principles.

5.2 Semiotic Impact: Poetic Parallelism

> What makes something interesting is that it can be seen to be like, or analogous to, something else. (Sontag 2001, 175)

No study of stand-up comedy would be adequate if it did not attend to its poetics as a *poetic form in social context*. During a process that culminated in Article III of the present dissertation, I have been influenced by Douglas Glick's (2007) illuminating account of poetic parallelism in stand-up that itself draws from Roman Jakobson's formulation of poetics (itself going back to the circle of Russian Formalists in the 1920s). Jakobson envisioned poetics as a broadly semiotic rather than merely linguistic phenomenon. For him, poetics is a formal sensory patterning of discourse that draws attention to co-present similarities and differences through reflexive juxtaposition (Jakobson 1960; Glick 2012; Lempert 2012; Lindfors 2017). Poetics is thus about messages indexing themselves in the pursuit of social and interactional efficacy—in the pursuit of *semiotic impact*. With respect to impact, stand-up comics naturally face the same problem as all socially conscious artists, leaders, and politicians: how to make the recipient of one's message move from aesthetic response (of pleasure) toward desired action, or how to give rise to effects in the recipient that themselves give rise to further effects (have the recipient experience or act on the world in a certain way). This problem of every activist-artist or "artivist" (Milohnić 2015) is also genre-specific for stand-ups, for they have to convince their recipients of the additional fact that they are not only fooling around but *also* serious about their issue.

If Susan Sontag is correct in arguing that interest stems from analogy and resemblance (iconicity in general), and if interest can be further understood as a form of impact, then we might say that poetics points to how discourse is made to draw attention itself, namely, how is it made *interesting* (see Ngai 2012, Chapter 1). Some of this impact might be aesthetic in nature, but rather than simply corresponding with creative expression or "artistry," poetics is an abstract and technical term to describe specific textual and communicative features of discourse, implying aesthetic norms as an active factor in the shaping of *any* meaningful expression—the basic tenet of folklore studies (Shuman & Hasan-Rokem 2012, 56; Noyes 2016a, Chapter 5; also Goltz 2015). What is more, attaching extra interest to discourse means imparting a force to the movement of a specific thread and bolstering its appeal for re-entextualization and replication in diverse contexts (Urban 2018, 261n9, and *passim*).

In particular, various scholars have illustrated how poetics manifests itself through the trope of parallelism (Silverstein 1984; Wilce 2009; Glick 2012; Fleming & Lempert 2014; Frog & Tarkka 2018). In heavily abstracted terms, parallelism can

be described as "repeating structures with patterned variation" (Brown 1999), as "a perceivable quality of sameness in two or more commensurate units of expression so that those units refer to one another as members of a parallel group" (Frog & Tarkka 2017, 206), or simply, as "recurrent returns" (Jakobson 1960). These parallel units are perceived to accumulate semiotic impact by indexing each other in real-time performance. Richard Parmentier (2016, 15; also 1997, 37–42) draws together a wealth of research in asserting that parallelisms or "other kinds of diagrammatic forms that manifest an asymmetrical indexical pattern or moment seem to be widespread semiotic constructs that realize social power in culture." However, as folklorists Frog and Lotte Tarkka (2017, 203) explain, while central for discussions of literature, poetics, and beyond, the phenomenon of parallelism is both so basic and pervasive that it has been challenging to pin down.

As a rule of thumb, Fleming & Lempert (2014) hypothesize that the more ritualized an action sequence is, the more likely we will be to find global poetic patterns within its purview. In particular, they suggest that various genres of ritual and performance tend to reiterate communal norms and cultural concepts in multimodal, globally poetic communicative configurations, where parallelism plays a major role (see also Silverstein 2004). In a similar fashion, I have aimed to show how parallelism is seen to organize stand-up as an oscillation between presentation and representation, where the relation of the stand-up comic to her routines is generally iconic vis-à-vis the relation of the comic to her audience (see Chapter 1.3).

Transformed into an *analytic* tool, parallelism is a flexible device with which to look at all kinds of communication (verbal, visual, aural) on all kinds of different levels (formal, thematic, pragmatic, interactional), yet it is one that has to be operationalized carefully (for parallelism on various scales, see Frog 2018b; Kallio 2018; Lempert 2018). More specifically, parallelism has to be conceptualized and operationalized with regard to the materials and empirical cases at hand (see Frog & Tarkka 2017). In Article III, which explicitly addresses the issue of parallelism in relation to interactional stance-taking, I look in detail at two cases of parallelism by two different stand-ups (see also Lindfors 2015). Here my scope is more formal but also more panoramic, adopting the poetic function in general and parallelism in particular to provide me with a view onto the "logical form" of representational modes (Kockelman 1999).[41]

[41] In his overview on poetic parallelism and logical forms, Kockelman (1999, 40) begins with the premise that in juxtaposing two or more tokens of a single type, parallelisms put forward and lay out variants of a common essence: "When one sets items in parallel then, one is expressing both the difference between examples, and the inability of a single example to ever fully characterize its essence […] As such […], parallelism is also a way of relating categories to their contents, an internal and aesthetic, rather than external and analytic, means of articulating the discrepancies or 'imperversions' that

In terms of stand-up discourse, we might first note that parallelism participates in *metricalizing* discourse among various other grammatical, syntactic, and semantic cues. Parallelism in discourse generally affords a metrical momentum that can be exploited and intensified by a diversity of relatively ritualized genres of discourse, let us say "spells, taunts, verbal duels, political oratory" (Lempert 2014, 384), but also (and in particular) by jokes and other genres of humor (see, e.g., Oring 2016, 207). In formal terms, the sequential structure of textuality participates in producing diagrammatic motivation between sequences, that is, in producing these sequences as inviting comparison and juxtaposition. The diagrammatically comparable or imagistically iconic sequences of stand-up routines are understood as indexing each other through resemblance in real-time performance. Whether they do this formally, thematically, or pragmatically, the indexical aspects of presupposition and entailment associated with these sequences bind the text (a stand-up routine) into a coherent whole. An ordinary case would be when stand-up comics first introduce themselves as X (say, through a type category of such-and-such features), so that the audience has some context for what is coming next, then expand on this attribute by unveiling an incongruous twist on the same attribute—i.e., by first expounding on oneself as text/figure, then as taken-for-granted context/ground, or vice versa (Keisalo 2018a).

This is performativity of the dynamic, sequential organization of discourse, one of the main forms of parallelism found in stand-up routines. These texts generally proceed through markedly sequential and often abruptly disconnected, almost *staccato*-like, units of expression, where the speaker has an idea of where audience laughter would cut the verbal emission. The sequentially positioned formal dyads of stand-up generally consist of *textual units* complemented by co-participant *laughter*, where subsequent textual units generally refer to their antecedents in the form of accretions, expansions, and analogies—or juxtapositions, contrasts, and negative analogies (see Tannen 2007, 60–62).

In her lauded comedy special *Nanette*, the Australian stand-up comic Hannah Gadsby (2018) includes several such extended sequences of performance where, through exquisitely synchronized and carefully paced verbal and non-verbal performance that is closely attuned with various audience responses, each of her consecutive utterances gets increasingly louder laughter in serially cumulative crescendos. Consider, for example, how she elaborates (starting at about 4:50 in the

lie between objects and subjects, sensuous and supersensual worlds, or states of affairs and their corresponding signs." I would also suggest that parallelism provides a viewpoint for considering how materiality and semioticity as aspects of all communication are intertwined and put into motion in performance. By embellishing repetition with meaningful variation, parallelism could be analyzed as also intertwining the ideational and material aspects of culture (Urban 1996).

show) on the public awareness regarding lesbians in 1990s Tasmania, where homosexuality was a crime until 1997. Coincidentally, this was also the place where Gadsby grew up and learned that she was gay.

1a but in all the debate about…
1b homosexuality… umm
1c no one ever really talked about the lesbians
1d you know? It was all the gay men –
1e "They're the problem!"
1f "Huh!"
1g "Anal sex…"
1h "That's when the devil will get ya!" [L]

2a but lesbians, they're like:
2b "No…"
2c "What even are they?"
2d "What do they do, though, really?" [L]

3a "Do they even exist if no one's watching, really?" [L]

4b "No, don't worry about them…"
4c "No harm in a cuddle." [L]

5a for a long time I knew more facts about unicorns
5b than I did, about lesbians [L]

6a another reason I struggled with… [abruptly stops]
6b – there are no facts… about unicorns [L]

That is to say, each of the textual sequences transcribed above—each of them culminating in audience laughter—can be seen to function as an "upgrade" that expands on earlier sequences while simultaneously also setting the ground for subsequent sequences (see also Du Bois 2007). The whole sequence itself is premised on a contrastive juxtaposition (explicitly set out at the start) between unevenly distributed public attention and awareness of homosexual men and women in 1990s Tasmania. This is the primary thematic or "symbolic" (Frog 2018) parallelism on which further repetitions build—as elaborations on a theme, as it were.

Although not referred to by this specific term in Article III, stand-up seems to exemplify what James M. Wilce (2017, 90) has recently referred to as pragmatic

parallelism. Pragmatic parallelism relies on mutually reinforcing and often sequentially cumulative discursive segments. Indeed, it is a sought-after and esteemed goal of stand-ups to produce as many and as extended cumulative sequences of laughter-inducing text as possible. Stand-up comics speak of "riding the waves of laughter" or "milking out" a specific topic or theme by looking at it from several different angles or adding new twists to established perspectives and storylines, where success can be deduced from the number of repeated bursts of laughter that an individual bit receives and is able to evoke (see also Jefferson et al. 1987). By the same token, the affective dynamic of stand-up can easily tend toward repetition or even boredom, in that audience members can be certain that the comic will aim at outdoing her previous bit or routine by provoking even louder laughter (see also Kavka 2008, 94).

Each of the laughs received by a routine, then, is understood *in relation to each other*, with each both presupposing and being entailed by earlier laughs. Such consecutive laughs participate in interactionally producing the same text, which means that they pragmatically parallel each other. Moreover, crossing the threshold of a sufficient number of co-related laughs within a single stand-up routine often gives rise to even more emergent laughs, as affective intensity builds on itself. Indeed, Wilce (2017, 90) observes that recognizing pragmatic parallelism always relies on our seeing a text as a whole, as a ritual text in which each repetition of a performative act constitutes a "beat of a drum." As he puts it, "It is the fusion of utterances into chains or musical scores that makes ritual discourse *do* what it does" (Wilce 2017, 90).

The formal way of putting this would be to say that poetic patterning often serves an implicit metapragmatic function within a text in the sense of providing interactants with reflexive cues "for regimenting the indexicals that fall within its scope" (Lempert 2006, 28). This means that the repeating patterns of parallelism can leave their mark (as a provisional context of sorts) on the variation that occurs within the purview of this repetition (Glick 2012); compare this with Salen & Zimmerman's (2004, 28) abstract definition of play as "free space of movement within a more rigid structure." Stand-up comics are eager to takie hold of such textual affordances. For instance, something relatively crude (racist, sexist, etc.) can be expressed on a denotative level, but contextualized on an emergent level of textuality it is revealed as perhaps casting an ironic light. Or, perhaps more typically, it is possible for stand-up comics to appropriate the affordances of emergent indexical patterning in order to implicitly posit something. (See also Goltz 2015.)

Such metapragmatic effects are always emergent rather than discursively localizable; they are patterns in time rather than static phenomena (Agha 2007a; see also Walsh 2011, 73–74). The surfeit of poetic patterns, potential resonances, and analogical affordances have to be apprehended, restrained, and circumscribed by

participants in interaction in order for them to become efficacious (Lindfors 2017a; Fleming & Lempert 2014). This also has the consequence that stand-up comics can more easily *deny* that their words and performances had anything dubious or questionable about them in the first place. By borrowing from Fauconnier & Turner (2002, 6), we might say that formal poetic patterns are themselves nothing if not "potential forces" that "can be unleashed dynamically and imaginatively" upon agents endowed with the power to construct meanings out of them. This is also why it is a precondition for studying parallelism that the analyst considers it as something like the *total social fact* talked about by Durkheim and Mauss and carefully contextualizes poetic discourse as part of its ethnographic and co-textual milieu.

Finally, while parallelism cannot be equated with analogy, parallel structures are often perceived as potentially inviting analogic inferences (see, e.g., Du Bois 2007), which is of course something that comedy can be said to very much live off of and thrive on. In this regard, much has been made of the articulations and overlaps between analogy (or metaphor) and humor, a point that I think merits extra attention and is generally interesting to think about in terms of stand-up. In short, whereas metaphor can be conceptualized as a mapping between source and target domains that gives rise to what cognitive scientists refer to as emergent "conceptual blends" (Fauconnier & Turner 2002), humor is typically approached through "appropriately incongruous" (Oring 2016) alignments of communicative, cognitive, affective, and normative elements. This is to say, a person will find something humorous if "the object of their mental state is a perceived incongruity" which is enjoyed "precisely for their perception of its incongruity" (Carroll 2014, 37; Marra 2017). Both metaphor and humor thus concern themselves with reciprocally indexing cognitive domains; semiotically speaking, they are forms or elaborations of diagrammatic iconicity.

Considering such an organically intimate relationship between these two centrally important cultural and communicative phenomena, is it not curious that one of them (i.e., metaphor as the paradigm of poetry) has been traditionally granted with relatively more political or cultural traction and performative force over the other (i.e., humor as the paradigm of comedy). In research, the self-serving explanation generally goes so that whereas in metaphor the alignment between the domains is perceived as "legitimate," and the recipients of metaphor are postulated as being left in an affirmative mode of pleasure, in humor the alignment is incongruous, illegitimate, or merely "tested," and the recipient of humor is postulated as being left in a state of reactionary and disengaged pleasure (Fauconnier & Turner 2002; Krikmann 2009). Folklorist Elliott Oring (2016, 52) says pretty much the same thing but from another angle when designating the distinction between metaphor and humor as a difference between syntax and meaning, where humor is a matter of syntax and metaphor a matter of meaning. According to Oring, "To be able to

characterize something as humorous is not necessarily to know what it means." He recalls the well-established observation according to which whether or not something might be comic can be recognized "technically," even though the meanings construed through this something might nevertheless remain obscure or inaccessible.

I would hesitate to argue that humor is merely a matter of syntax. First of all, metaphor can be also perceived or intuited without full semantic accessibility: think of any "difficult" poem that plays with metaphors so dense as to leave readers dumbfounded. Second, do not comics also defend their offensive puns and jokes in a manner of "syntax over semantics" in often arguing that their bits are merely a "play on words" (i.e., formal technicality without consequential meaning)? (See also Fornäs 2017 for a related critique of Ricoeur 1974.) That is to say, in reducing humor to mere syntax we risk obscuring the historical and cultural sedimentations of interpretative practice inherent in and echoing every communicative act and unit, whether grammatical, lexemic, syntactic, etc.

I would rather argue that the performative and poetic force of humor resides in its affordances for reflexively calibrated shifts of attention. What particularly accomplished humor and comedy such as Gadsby's *Nanette* manages to do is to stage and show us the world in a new light. Indeed, on its release *Nanette* was widely celebrated for its "dressing down of patriarchy" and the "takedown of its myths, particularly the one about the virile, passionate male genius" (Schumacher 2018). Jennifer Marra (2016) has recently hammered home this feature of humor by contending that the phenomenological function of humor is *revelation*. For Marra, revelation is what humor *does*: "Humor draws attention to something which was not in conscious thought before, it brings to the fore that which has been forgotten or unknown, it uncovers contradictions where one thought none lie." Rather than being fantastical, mythical, or imaginary (although it can be those as well), Lisa Trahair (2007) suggests that comedy is an inherently realist mode of aesthetics that works by *degrading* the "ought" (the ideal) with the "is" (the real) rather than neutrally juxtaposing the one alongside the other.

In parallelism, we might say, humor has its "internal and aesthetic, rather than external and analytic" (see Kockelman 1999) means of articulating such revelations of "faulty belief and error in judgment" (Marra 2016). In affording such means, I believe that humor can be regarded as one of the essential tools we are collectively—and some say phylogenetically—endowed with.

6. Research Articles

Aside from the present discussion, the dissertation includes four articles previously published in journals representing the respective orientations of linguistic anthropology, folklore and cultural studies, and ethnology. The articles reveal the course of my journeys (and many an occasional drift) through the realms of humanistic inquiry, addressing the poetics of self-mediation in stand-up on a variety of scales, from the intricacies of verbal art to the broader implications of social accountability, exemplarity, or relatability as central aspects of the form.

Article I, "Cultivating Participation and the Varieties of Reflexivity in Stand-Up Comedy" (pre-published in *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*), outlines some of the implications of stand-up as a staged performance of self-presentation that is constrained by a specific type of participant structure and an interactional setting. The article begins by distinguishing between three modes of footing—subjectifying, situational, objectifying—as pragmatically organizing the role configurations of this form and by then looking at how this tripartite framework is metapragmatically regimented and codified within the genre. I argue that stand-up necessitates an orientation to oneself as both a token individual and as a recognizable and relatable type, and further how stand-up comics juxtapose themselves as type figures by reciprocally typifying their audiences through *their* most emblematic indices. On the broad, the article attends to novel intersections of publics and selves in contemporary culture by examining how token selves are appropriated and regimented in stand-up through a reflexivity innate to the genre that positions these selves amongst a variety of socially recognizable, typified voices. Finally, the analytic import of the framework of the three footings is elaborated on through the investigation of a performance by James Lórien MacDonald, drawn from fieldwork in Finland.

Article II, "Performance of Moral Accountability and the Ethics of Satire in Stand-Up Comedy" (originally published in *Ethnologia Europaea: Journal of European Ethnology*, 47:2), explores how stand-up comics dramatize aspects of (intentional) agency in satirizing their chosen targets. In particular, I propose a novel vantage point vis-à-vis satire as depending on a target on which it is possible to attribute agency and moral responsibility. In other words, I uncover satirical discourse as a self-serving discourse practice that manipulates the "public, social

accountability that a person can rightfully be subject to" (Sidnell & Enfield 2017, 463; also Enfield & Sidnell 2017). By first analyzing sequences of performance by the South African stand-up Trevor Noah and the Finnish stand-up Jamie MacDonald (nowadays James Lórien MacDonald) from the perspective of stylization of intentional agency and accountability, I then elaborate on the question of why and how eagerly satire seems to target unwitting actions and habitual practices. I look at these implications of satire in light of Western discourses on ethics, where habitual practices have been generally reduced to mere un-self-aware behavior (Das 2012, 139). Insofar as such discourse practices have to be seen as fundamentally gendered, often also interweaving "ideals of class, race, respectability, and sexuality" (Cronin 2000, 280), I suggest that forthcoming studies on satirical discourse should turn to such implications of this device in various historical and cultural contexts.

Article III, "Twin Constellations: Parallelism and Stance in Stand-Up Comedy" (originally published in *Oral Tradition*, Vol. 31, Issue 2), grew out of my interest in the poetic technique of parallelism, originally analyzed by linguistic anthropologist Douglas Glick (2007) in the context of my chosen genre. In fact, it was Glick's seminal article on the poetics of stand-up that was crucial in leading me to the riches of linguistic anthropology and to parallelism as one of its privileged notions. Subsequently, the two-day seminar workshop organized by the Department of Folklore Studies at the University of Helsinki in 2014 convinced me to focus on precisely this device for a full-length article—a decision that later turned out to have been formative in terms of my research orientation.

Drawing parallels and analogies between patterns and relations that "we might not have thought about, but recognize when they are shown to us" (Keisalo 2016) is pretty much what stand-up comics do. However, I go into further detail by asking how this central method of comedy manifests itself in the "final product" and operates in textual, interactional, and poetic terms. In the article, I first take a metatheoretical look at parallelism as a concept used in many disciplines and areas of research, which I propose are crudely divided into 1) those that look at parallelism as a strictly textual and rhetorical phenomenon, where expressive units repeat (and vary) on the scales of grammar, syntax, and lexicon, and 2) those that adopt the notion of parallelism for mutually implicating phenomena on the more symbolic or interactional levels of cultural scripts, concepts, stance-taking, and positioning. This is not to say that grammar, syntax, and lexicon do not hold symbolic, interactional, and pragmatic significance, as this is precisely what they do! After offering a brief overview of parallelism with regard to stand-up comedy, I then set out to dissect two performances by two contemporary stand-up comics, Stewart Lee and Hari Kondabolu. Looking first at the relationship between an extended analogical parallelism and ironic effect in an episode of *Stewart Lee's Comedy Vehicle*—being representative of the type of parallelism and approach to parallelism that focuses on

sequential textual repetition—I turn to an introductory sequence of Kondabolu, where parallelism is manifested as something I capture as "positional spatialization of discursive interaction," or, a recurrent structural relation of a configuration of positioning.

Corroborated with insights from both gesture and cognitive studies, Article IV, "Spatiotemporal Management of Stand-Up Performance: Narration and Gestures" (originally published in *Cultural Analysis: Interdisciplinary Forum on Folklore and Popular Culture* Volume 16.2), provides an in-depth analysis of narration and simultaneous gestures in an introductory routine by the British stand-up comic Josie Long. After providing detailed distinctions between narrative orientations and gestural typologies in light of stand-up as oral performance and verbal art, the article addresses how stand-up comics maintain a multimodal and multifunctional performance orientation toward ongoing interaction, one's act of narration, and the narrated storyworlds invoked therein—or, as I would now phrase it in the vocabulary of the present discussion, toward stand-up as presentation and representation. By means of analysis, indexical and inferential traffic is shown to move in both directions. Not only does interaction function as the backdrop for narratives, the performer also frames the unfolding performance event by indexing its features through narrative. In particular, the article lays out an example of how stand-up comics alternate between engaging in narration as themselves and mimetic enactments involving what Oliver Double calls "instant characters" in often imaginary spatiotemporal frames, moving along the continuum of what I have conceptualized as the trajectory of becoming-character.

The main research questions and the primary contributions of each article are summarized below:

Table 1. The main research questions and the primary contributions of the articles to the dissertation.

Article	Title	Main research question	Primary contribution to the dissertation
I	Cultivating Participation and the Varieties of Reflexivity in Stand-Up Comedy	As a staged performance of self-presentation, how does stand-up comedy mediate between individuality and typicality, or, subjectivity and objectivity?	The article distinguishes between three modes of footing as pragmatically organizing the role configurations of stand-up comedy and then looks at how this tripartite framework is metapragmatically regimented and codified within the genre. Stand-up is argued as necessitating an orientation to oneself as both a token individual and as a recognizable and relatable type figure.
II	Performance of Moral Accountability and the Ethics of Satire in Stand-Up Comedy	What are the implications of satire as an emotional and moral discourse practice for stand-up comedy as an oral performance?	Satire is conceptualized as a Western discursive practice that presupposes a target on which it is possible to attribute agency and moral accountability. Accordingly, stand-up comics are analyzed as dramatizing aspects of the (intentional) agency of their targets in both verbal and non-verbal detail, as well as preferably targeting seemingly un-self-aware, habitual practices.
III	Twin Constellations: Parallelism and Stance in Stand-Up Comedy	How does the poetic principle of parallelism organize stand-up comedy as both text and interaction?	Parallelism is recognized as a flexible analytic tool that has to be operationalized with an eye toward disciplinary orientation, research questions, and material. Parallelism is conceptualized as a textual phenomenon that organizes acts of interactional stance-taking between the stand-up comic, her routines, and her audience.
IV	Spatiotemporal Management of Stand-Up Performance: Narration and Gestures	How do gesture and movement juxtapose and mediate various conceptual spaces and narrative perspectives in interaction with verbal narration?	By outlining a framework of narrative orientations, stand-up narration is analyzed as moving between 1) narration as oneself in the shared interactional space with an audience, 2) illustrated narration that combines both observer and character viewpoints, and 3) mimetic enactments within the storyworld. This gradient continuum, labeled as the trajectory of becoming-character, is offered as a heuristic for exploring stand-up on a scale from mimetic embodiment of self to relatively more mediated forms of personation and impersonation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1.

Questionnaire for stand-up comics (translated from Finnish)

General questions

1. How, when, and why did you start doing stand-up comedy? How has Finnish stand-up changed in your opinion during the time you have been actively involved with it?
2. What kinds of themes do you deal with in your comedy and how did you establish them? How would you describe your own style in terms of content, performance, habitus, etc.?
3. For what kinds of people (performers) is stand-up (un)suitable or (ill-)suited, and why?

Stage persona

4. How do you understand the stage persona in stand-up? Have you knowingly developed yourself into a recognizable character? How long does this process take? Describe it.
5. How categorically do you distinguish between your stage persona and "yourself"? Do you try to be yourself on stage? Is this character already in your mind? Do you aim at impersonating and reproducing it on stage? Do you think it is one aspect of your self, which manifests on stage?
6. Do you recognize yourself as your persona/character also offstage? Do different aspects of the persona mix in everyday life? Is it possible for a stand-up comic to turn into their stage persona?

Material

7. What kinds of bits are relatable for audiences? How much do you modify or edit your set according to the current audience?
8. How important is it for you that your stories or viewpoints are real or at least draw from actual events?

9. Have you felt that some themes/bits are inappropriate for yourself, and why? Do you censor yourself as stand-up comic, and how?
10. Do you target/deal with yourself or your features in your comedy? Is it important to display awareness of one's features onstage, and why? Is it different to deal with oneself comically compared with other themes?

Privacy/personality

11. Do you use your personal experiences as material for comedy? Is this something that is expected of stand-up comics? Can it become a burden?
12. Does stand-up comedy as a performance genre enable self-reflection and the addressing of personal or intimate subjects in a particular way? Does the stand-up stage enable one to analytically distance oneself from one's experiences, thoughts, and persona, and how?
13. What does it feel like to speak of personal issues on stage? What does the laughter feel like during personal or more serious bits? Is it possible for stand-up to function as therapy for comics themselves, and how?
14. What does it feel like to fail one's gig? Is it shameful, and how? Is it possible for the stage persona to shield one from this shame?

Performance

15. Is it important in stand-up to establish an (intimate) connection with one's audience, or is it possible to get distance from one's audience on purpose? How does one best connect with an audience?
16. What kinds of objects is attention drawn to onstage? On one's material and its recollection, on performance, on audience reactions, or on reciprocally reacting to them?
17. Is it possible to improvise in stand-up, and is it something to strive for? Are there specific moments when improvisation becomes possible? Do audiences recognize/appreciate improvised moments?

Influence

18. How do you perceive the relation between stand-up and (social) influence or activism? Do you regard your comedy as influential? Is stand-up a good way to influence people, or is this something preferable at all?
19. What kind of personal feedback do you receive from audiences and people? What kind of material do people relate to?
20. What is most fulfilling about stand-up, on the one hand, or unpleasant, on the other, and why?