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**“Luxury Items”: Discourses of Cultural Value in  
Creating Channel 4 Comedy**

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## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
‘How Channel 4 is that?’: Channel 4 Creative Identity and Case Study	11
The Specificity of Channel 4 and Leading the Industry in	
Broadcasting Diversity	16
Researching Discourse in the Creative Industries	20
Macro, Meso and Micro Level Discourses of Comedy at Channel 4:	
Tiers of Laughter	21
<b>Literature Review</b>	<b>24</b>
Cultural Value and Creative Worth	24
Creativities: Industrial, Institutional and Individual	26
The Creative Individual: Exceptionalism and the Genius Myth	30
Measuring Creative Output	34
“The risk to be different”: Making Space for Creativity and Institutional	
Management	38
British Broadcasting and Labour in the British Creative Industries	43
The Culture Industry: Comedy and Mass Media	47
Television, Comedy and Cultural Status	50
The New Left on Broadcasting: Channel 4 and the Democratic	
Communications Model	55
“Television Supplement”: Cultural Studies and British Broadcasting Systems	56
The Authoritarian Model	57
The Paternalistic Model	60
The Commercial Model	64

The Democratic Model	66
<b>Methodologies</b>	<b>72</b>
Discourse Analysis and Institutions as Case Study	72
Multi-platform Analysis and Three Sites of Inquiry	75
Interview Ethics, Reflexivity and Provenance	79
<b>Section One: The Industry</b>	<b>83</b>
British Broadcasting Policy and the Establishment of Channel 4	83
The Broadcasting Act of 1980 and 1981 and Channel 4's First Programme Policy	84
Broadcasting Values in Policy: Why a Fourth Channel?	87
The Annan Report and the Design of the Channel Four Corporation	90
Institutions and Audiences: Debating the Fourth Channel's Purpose	93
The Regulation of Independent Production	95
The Pilkington Report and Understandings of Diversity and Quality	99
What is 'Minority' Content?	103
Reith, Paternalism and British Public Service Broadcasting	107
"Programme Standards": Taste, Morality and Distinctions of Cultural Value	110
"A Force for Plurality": Independent Production and Publishing	116
<b>Section Two: The Institution</b>	<b>120</b>
Comedy Commissioning: Art, Luxury and Expense	120
Big 'C' and Little 'c' Distinctions: Culture, Creativity and Comedy	124
"Fighting the Corner": Seriousness, Legitimacy and Defending Comedy at Channel 4	128
Scripted Comedy and Authorship	130
Developing New Talent: Learning to Write Comedy	132

The Cost of Cultural Value: ‘Every time a comedy’s on the air, it’s sort of losing the channel money’	135
Distinctiveness and Divisiveness: Authorship and Culture Discount	138
“It’s not for me, so it’s shit”: Misconceptualising Creativity and Comedy at Channel 4	142
Audiences, Social Media and Hostility	144
Internal Strife: Channel 4 Personnel and Doubting Comedy	148
Investing in Innovation: Taking Time and Taking Money	149
Leaving Channel 4 Comedy: The ‘New Regime’	152
Comedy with a Capital ‘C’: Departmental Categorisation and Cultural Distinction	156
Histories of Channel 4 Comedy and Entertainment	158
Calling Content “Comedy”: Problematising Genre Theory Research on Television Comedy	162
Studying Sitcom: Genre Form as Cultural Value	163
Creating Comedy: Post-structural Television Genre Theory	165
Conventions of Studying Television Comedy and Genre	168
Small ‘c’ Comedy: Entertainment Writing as Contributory	170
Channel 4 Entertainment and Tone: Broadness, Warmth and not being “Mean”	172
“An Odd Beast”: Entertainment and Channel 4’s Public Service Remit	174
<b>Section Three: The Individual</b>	<b>177</b>
Creative Practice and ‘Making Funny Stuff’	177
“It Just Came Out Funny”: Comedy Writers, Authorship and Immaculate Creativity	181
Writing Partnerships: Collaborative Authorship	189
When a Comedy Doesn’t “Land”: What goes wrong when it goes wrong?	193
The Silent Mechanic: The Role of Script Editor in Comedy	197
Channel Notes: “They have good thoughts but they don’t know how to articulate them”	204

Distinctions of Quality in Constructing Comedy and Entertainment	209
Mainstream Television Comedy and the Risk of Prime Time: Safety in Numbers?	214
<b>Conclusions</b>	221
Section One: British Broadcasting Public Service and Comedy as Entertainment Television	224
Section Two: Creating Genre through Discourse and the Meaning of Entertainment	227
Section Three: Creative Work and Cultural Value in Generic Labour Forces	230
Further Research	232
Final Thoughts	234
<b>Webography</b>	238
<b>Bibliography</b>	240
<b>Appendix</b>	250
List of Contributors	250

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“Mark Corrigan: Haven't you got work in the morning?

Jeremy Usborne: Oh yeah, that's really gonna break his balls if I roll in an hour late. Mark, [...] he's a creative, *I'm* a creative. We don't make steam engines out of pig iron in this country anymore, yeah? We hang out, we fuck around on the Playstation, we have some Ben & Jerry's. That's how everyone makes their money now, yeah?”

(Mark and Jez discuss labour and the creative economy *Peep Show*, Season 4, Ep. 4, 2007)

## Abstract

This thesis examines the discourses around creativity and cultural value that underpin the language used to construct television comedy at Channel 4 within three sites: broadcasting policy documents, interviews with Channel 4 heads of department and commissioners, and creative practitioners that have produced comedies for Channel 4 broadcast.

In doing so this thesis uses a post-structural discourse analysis perspective with which to approach how comedy is understood as a genre within television industry policy, how departmental categorisation creates meaning around social purpose through discourses of cultural value and how this is both recreated and manifest among the understanding of what it means to create television comedy under the public service remit with which Channel 4 is charged.

Through this multi-platform analysis, this study brings new light to comedy's position within British broadcasting's traditions of public service, it highlights the distinction of cultural value enacted by positioning some forms of comedy under the Comedy Department and others elsewhere under Entertainment.

I argue that this process of inclusion and exclusion is framed through the justification of value in a way that reconstructs binary cultural hierarchies dependent on the notion of art and creativity as oppositional to the commercial and the popular. As such this thesis concludes that such cultural hierarchies are problematic for access and diversity in the creative labour force of British television comedy at Channel 4, particularly within the context of Channel 4's specific remit to host a diverse range of talent both on and off screen and in doing so to encourage diversity, as a reflection of a pluralised British audience and society, across all British terrestrial channels.

## Introduction

The key aim of this thesis is to critically examine the ways in which cultural value is bestowed on television comedy, both as a generic text and as an industrial practice, through discourses of creativity. It does so in order to interrogate the prevalent assumptions that underpin existing literature around television comedy, where it is argued that it is the low cultural status of television comedy that has led to its neglect as a cultural category in academic investigation.

Through its analysis of how television comedy is discursively constructed within the industry itself, at legislative, institutional and production levels, this thesis sheds new light on the more complex interaction of cultural value discourses around British television comedy than the “small time” (Mills, 2009: 9) or “unworthy” (Attalah, 1984) status of television observed outside of the industry, might suggest. Indeed, a key question that this thesis responds to, is where sitcom and sketch programmes are understood to be more culturally valuable categories of television production and programming when put in the context of the television industry more broadly with particular reference to the cultural and social value placed upon British public service broadcasting and its relation to private, commercial funding.

This intervention into discourses of cultural value is one that examines the operative language of the creative industries themselves as sites of such construction. Much of British cultural studies’ critical literature on the creative industries has long been focused on hierarchies of power in the organisation of cultural production with, increasingly, more attention paid to the working conditions that characterise these sectors of the burgeoning creative economy (Williams, 1981; Deuze, 2007; Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Banks, Gill and Taylor: 2014). However, this thesis foregrounds the conceptual construction of categories of television genre and their departmental organisation within broadcasters, as processes that themselves have impact on the value and conditions of creative work, as economic and organisational hierarchies are argued to do elsewhere.

I examine the ways in which talk around British television comedy distributes cultural value and creative worth at three different sites of discursive construction: the industrial, the

institutional and the individual. It does so by addressing in particular the diametric opposition of creativity with commercialism, using Channel 4 as a case study of a broadcasting institution that has, over its three decades on air, always included comedy programming in its output. This study of comedy as a cultural, generic and organisational category is of particular interest at Channel 4, as in 2012 the combined institutional category of the Comedy and Entertainment Department was divided into two separate departments. There remain blurs, however, between these two categories: the 4od streaming web site categorises many Entertainment Department commissions under its Comedy banner; sponsorships attached to Channel 4 Comedy (Fosters lager and the We Buy Any Car web site) also announce Entertainment commissions *The Last Leg* (Channel 4: 2012 - ) and *8 Out of 10 Cats* (Channel 4: 2005 - ); Channel 4's web site on the upcoming commissions for 2015 announce Comedy and Entertainment Highlights on a combined page (Channel 4, Comedy and Entertainment, 2014). This thesis, then, examines what the departmental distinction between these two once combined categories means and represents for Channel 4.

As a broadcaster that has commissioned and developed comedy within the tension of its public service remit and its commercial funding structures, what Simon Blanchard describes as "the two faces of Channel 4" (Blanchard, 2013), this analysis contributes to and expands on debates around British public service broadcasting and the debates around public and private funding. This thesis looks at this tension and examines what is said to happen to comedy when creativity and commercial interests shift, in order to understand how comedy is understood within the culture of British broadcasting. This tension between its creative purpose and its commercialism is both why I believe that Channel 4 is a pertinent site of analysis over the construction of comedy through these processes of categorisation and also why Channel 4 is a neglected case study to examine debates around public service in British television broadcasting, which has until now been dominated by interest in the BBC. It is my contention, as grounds for this analysis that it is the complicated relationship between public service and Channel 4's commercial context that presents a muddied sense of identity for the broadcaster, when these debates are so focused around what to do with *public* money. While I don't suggest that Channel 4 is necessarily under less scrutiny from those that evaluate its public service remit or regulate its operation as a broadcaster, I do suggest that Channel 4 sits outside of both the academic and media debates around the spending of public money. As such fears around the ways in which it argues that it fulfils its social purpose is purely cultural for its audiences, not financial as it is with the BBC and its use of television license

fees as a vital and defining source of funding.

This analysis, then, shows how comedy operates as a generic category within British television legislation, how comedy manifests as an organisational category and commissioning department within Channel 4 and how the characterisation of comedy as a specific type of work distributes value amongst its creative labour force at production level. It does so in the knowledge that these three sites of discourse may conflict or overlap at times in their construction of creativity. Its intention is to use a top down multi-level approach to develop a more comprehensive understanding of comedy and comedy work within a British national and industrial context and highlight the complexities of cultural value therein. In doing so this thesis contributes to understanding of how both creativity and comedy are produced through language via the discursive oppositional positioning of cultural value and commercialism. It is this tension that defines Channel 4's institutional structure as both a public service broadcaster and as a broadcaster funded by advertisement sales, rather than public money or taxation.

While there have been several publications on Channel 4, these have tended to form historical narratives of how it came about and its very early operations, such as in *Channel Four: television with a difference?* (Lambert, 1982), *What's this Channel Fo(u)r?: an alternative report* (Ed. Blanchard and Morley, 1982) and *Channel 4: the early years and the Jeremy Isaacs legacy* (Hobson, 2008). With the broadcaster celebrating its fourth decade on air, some more recent evaluations have emerged on the comparative state of Channel 4 as an institution and its ability to perform its designated function (Blanchard, 2013; Andrews: 2014). Rather than recording the broadcaster's operational activities or making a value judgement on the extent to which it is, by some definition, creative or to which it fulfils its public service remit, this thesis demonstrates how Channel 4 as an institution is *created* through the language in the texts analysed and the sense in which industries, institutions and how what it means to be creative is understood through an ongoing discursive process. This thesis finds not only how comedy is constructed as a genre and a practice in relation to Channel 4's creative/commercial identity, but also how Channel 4 is both reflected in the language and continues to argue for its existence by referencing this claim to creative value and social purpose in public statements and broadcast content.

The three sites of analysis, the industrial, the institutional and the individual, consist of

government reports and legislation on British broadcasting, primary interviews I conducted with heads of department and commissioners at Channel 4 and primary interviews with creative practitioners, who have worked on comedy programming commissioned and/or developed by Channel 4. The key data for this study will be the language used to construct cultural value, how it represents broader discourses around creativity and how these manifest for comedy at Channel 4 specifically. Through a detailed thematic analysis of the language around comedy and creativity at these three sites, as well as the organisational statements made around what is included under the category of the Channel 4 Comedy Department, the findings from this research will reflect not just how comedy as an industry, as a category and as type of creative work are talked about, but what the ways in which it is talked about *does*.

While the word 'creating' is used in the title of this thesis to refer literally to the creative practices of commissioning and producing Channel 4 comedy, it refers also to the methodological perspective with which this study understands discourse analysis: talk, whether in written or verbal form, can be read as the organisation of form statements through which cultural phenomena are created. That is, cultural phenomena do not exist only to be observed within the text, to be analysed after the fact, but consist of and are created by the very process of their production and the ways in which they are constructed by creative workers. It also understands that, as stated above, these different sites for the creation of such cultural phenomena hold conflicting discourses both within themselves and in response to one another. This discourse analysis, then, is one that examines how comedy is created at three tiers: the linguistic and structural forms found in broadcasting legislation, the departmental categorisation within Channel 4 and the creative worth placed on different roles within the creative labour force of the British television comedy industry.

#### **“How Channel 4 is *that*?“ - Channel 4, Creative Identity and Case Study**

Before the presentation of the Best Actress Prize at the 2013 British Comedy Awards, broadcast on Channel 4, host Jonathan Ross remarked on how all of the nominees in the category were women, quipping “How Channel 4 is *that*?”. Ross's joke might've been a

sarcastic critique of superficial branding or it might've been a sincere allusion to the broadcaster's progressive reputation to point out that the nominations elsewhere were dominated by men. Nevertheless, it is clear that the use of "Channel 4" as an adjective functions under a common perception of Channel 4, understood by the live audience of industry workers at the awards and the audiences watching the broadcast from home. The gender equality ethos of the joke suggests that this perception of the broadcaster is one that is progressive, diverse and, in being so, different to other broadcasters. As the first section of this thesis will outline, the perception that Ross's joke assumes, reflects the impetus for Channel 4's entire inception and is still central to its public service remit today, to provide programming that "demonstrates innovation, experimentation and creativity...appeals to the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society...and exhibits a distinctive character" (*Channel 4 Remit, Channel 4 Corporate*, n.d.).

I argue that this alignment of innovation, experimentation and the implicit sense of risk that runs alongside these denotations of creativity with the public service remit are, for Channel 4, central to the language of Channel 4's sense of cultural value and that the construction of comedy at Channel 4 is essential to the ways in which the broadcaster evidences its commitment to such a creative identity. However, this is complicated by the various ways in which Channel 4 defines comedy in its public statements, its broadcast content and online material, and as such the construction of what is, and what is not, comedy. The discursive construction of comedy, therefore, is a valuable site for understanding not only what it is to be creative or uncreative at Channel 4, but to understand what characterises the comedy programming that sits in this residual category of that which is not dealt with by the Comedy Department.

Creativity is, more often than not, talked about in the literature as an elusive, malleable, even liquid term, causing issues of definition which insist on the setting of parameters of meaning within each study of the phenomenon. Plucker and Makel state that some theorists, confronted with this trouble with the term, avoid defining creativity at all (2010: 48). There are a number of sites of definition that are offered: measuring the creativity of a product, the characteristics of the creative individual, the creative environment and the stages of the creative process. These themes will be outlined further in the literature review of this thesis to understand 'what it is to be creative' for Channel 4's institutional ideology specifically.

As this study uses discourses of creativity to make sense of talk around television comedy and Channel 4, rather than an argument that creativity can be said to be either present or absent, I do not suggest that a universal definition for creativity is relevant here. However, there are recurrent terms that feature in the existing literature around creativity that appear in Channel 4's identifying statements. I look then not just to the conception that Ross' joke alludes to, but the specific statements Channel 4 makes about its public service and the social value that it is charged with fulfilling – as a public service broadcaster, its evidence of fulfilling its social purpose is the basis for its economy of cultural value. So while a common definition of the creative product might exist "...in the sense of being original and useful" (Kozbelt, et al. 2010: 20), this usefulness, for Channel 4, is defined by the remit to which it is contracted. This remit will be analysed in Section One of this thesis, and further supported by examining government commissioned broadcasting reports.

This issue of definition and of how we talk about creativity in different ways is evident in the various contexts of British broadcasting institutions – the word 'creativity' is often used but it means different things at different broadcasters. Channel 4 has the notion of creativity at the very core of its remit, but this is not unusual in British public service broadcasting; the BBC asserts, for example, in the "Mission and Values" section of its web site that it strives to be "the most creative organisation in the world" and that "creativity is the lifeblood of [the] organisation" (*Inside the BBC, Missions and Values*, n.d.). But while the word "creativity" is prioritised by both of these public service broadcasters, their creative identities and the remit to fulfil this creative responsibility manifest with quite different social purposes within the landscape of British television broadcasting.

For instance, the BBC has included in its programme policy for BBC One published in September of 2014 that the channel should present "innovation that should appeal to a *broad* audience", it should "bring music and arts to the *mainstream*" and should provide a service that is "distinctive in comparison with other *mass appeal* channels" [emphasis added] (*BBC One Service License, BBC Trust*, 2014). While the words emphasised here are not evident in the programme policies of all BBC channels, the requirement to provide broad, mainstream and mass appeal television is not at odds with the BBC's public service responsibility overall. These words are, however, very much absent from Channel 4's remits and reports about their own public service where they are required to "encourage pluralism" in British broadcasting and to "foster the new and experimental" (*Channel 4, Statement of Promises*, 2013). While

newness and experimentation are common to definitions of creativity, pluralism is perhaps a rarer signifier of creative worth or, indeed, cultural value. This is where creativity might be defined differently at different institutions in relation to other elements of public service. While the BBC is certainly charged with dealing with issues of diversity it is Channel 4, in the context of British broadcasting that is key to this notion of experimentation and as such creativity: as Sarita Malik suggests '[Channel 4's] true innovation was as the only UK terrestrial channel...with multicultural programming embedded as part of its core practice and infrastructure' (Malik, 2008: 232) and became "what might be regarded as a multicultural public sphere" (*Ibid*).

Channel 4 refers to the fulfilment of this responsibility in their commitment to "diversity and [the] ability to appeal to audiences not catered for elsewhere in UK television" (*Channel 4, Review of 2005*, 2006). As the "Born Risky" promotional campaign has been reminding Channel 4 viewers since 2012, taking creative risks is at the heart of how the broadcaster talks about all aspects of its programming. This campaign has so far consisted of a feature length trailer, broadcast both in full and as an edited version on live television as well as a series of accompanying idents within programme scheduling that flash up a graphic of a spinning pyramid and the Channel 4 slogan "Born Risky". The full-length trailer begins with Channel 4 News anchor Jon Snow saying to camera, "The images which follow are extremely distressing"; a voiceover states "This is authentic, stripped down, TV"; slogans flash up on screen, "Not safe for politicians", "WTF?", "May challenge prejudices", "Not everyone's cup of tea"; a final voiceover states "Channel 4 was set up to take creative risks and put its profit back into programmes. We were born to experiment, born to challenge, born risky".

This public statement Channel 4 is making about why it was launched or how it was 'born', characterises the broadcaster as expressly independent from and challenging of the political establishment, as being of the *Zeitgeist*, being progressive, honest and knowingly appealing to smaller more niche audiences. In terms of the link between creativity and being 'risky', risk is talked about in the literature as an inevitable condition under which experimentation, in the pursuit of originality and innovation, takes place (Ekwall and Tangeberg, 1986; Vangundy, 1987; West, 1999). Indeed, it is argued that a lack of risk taking is a direct barrier to creative achievement and as such risk, and an environment in which failure can be tolerated and learned from, is essential to a an innovative and progressive process (Basadur, 1987).

While it might not be so surprising that on their thirty year anniversary a creative institution with a front facing public presence might reaffirm the character under which it was designed, it is pertinent that the idea of risk is so central to the social purpose the trailer emphasises. In particular, here we see how risk is tied so explicitly to the creative identity and creative practice of the broadcaster – where elsewhere the BBC describes itself as aspiring to be “the most creative institution in the world” (*Inside the BBC, Missions and Values*, n.d.), it speaks less of risk as an essential part of being creative. The two public service broadcasters’ describe their respective *creativities* quite differently. What this might suggest, is that which Channel 4 celebrates as being definitive of its character, and wishes to emphasise during an opportunity for public reflection on its position as a creative institution, is that which is experimental and thus has the potential to turn away those audiences looking for the familiar. The construction of Channel 4’s creative worth, then, is expressed through its dedication to fulfilling the very first conception of its public service.

The construction of Channel 4’s remit and creative worth, however, might be seen as potentially at odds with its commercial funding structures. As its own web site makes plain and public about its present operation, Channel 4 receives no public money and is funded entirely by advertising but is not shareholder owned (*Channel 4 Corporate, About C4*, 2015). So it is not that this is a profit motivated organisation who must satisfy the investments of its shareholders, it is that it operates as a non-profit public service provider without license fee or taxation spending. But while Channel 4’s commercial funding might consequently not be stigmatised with the same discourses of the Culture Industry’s profit hungry motivations, its greed and its corruption of culturally valuable phenomena, Channel 4 does have to reach enough viewers, enough of the time, to make profit that can be “directly reinvested back into the delivery of our public service remit” (*Ibid*). How is this idea of creative risk and the ability to fail evident in the three tiers of investigation? Does it operate in the same way in the legislation describing what Channel 4 should be able to do, and what it must do, in how the institution itself talks about what its programme formats do? How does such talk also manifest in interviews with those working at production level?

Within traditions of creativity discourses which will be outlined further in the next section, this thesis works to understand how Channel 4’s commercial dependency and its advertising revenue might be positioned in conflict with its creative construction through the organisation of the institution – that is, if the interests of these two elements of Channel 4’s

design are understood to be in conflict, in what ways are these interests distributed? This research looks at how these two supposedly oppositional institutional characteristics co-exist, are delineated to different bodies within the organisation and how this delineation has an impact on the meaning of those bodies.

The first section will cover how the inception of Channel 4 was said to perform a remedy to the failings of the BBC/ITV duopoly of the 1970s. As the Jonathan Ross quote above continues to construct into the broadcaster's fourth decade, Channel 4, and Channel 4-ness, were originally characterised by a sense of being distinct. This initial imagining of Channel 4, not just as a creative institution but as one that serves to have an impact on the broader industry, shows that language in legislation is not just reflective of what an institution is but the very method through which its identity and meaning is created. And for Channel 4 it is this legislative language and this public service conception that it continues to create that reflects these early constructions. Part of the sense in which I will establish what claims are made to Channel 4 comedy's cultural value is the extent to which it is said to fulfil the specifics of how the aims suggested in this industry and audience perception are outlined in its public service remit. As broadcasting remains a central site of concern for legislation around the cultural industries in the UK, I here posit an analysis of the ways in which legislative language creates distinctions of creative worth, taking the position that creative worth is characterised differently dependent on the parameters of particular creative institutions. In doing so this study accesses ground around the construction of creativity within television comedy and its production for Channel 4 with greater specificity than a review across broadcasters can offer.

### **The Specificity of Channel 4 and Leadership in Broadcasting Diversity**

An essential element of this thesis' contribution to existing literature is the attention it pays to Channel 4. The significance of Channel 4 is constructed through the sense in which it was created to serve not only as an alternative sensibility in relation to the rest of the British broadcasting system but also to affect the rest of the system through its own institutional practice. Histories of British broadcasting have often tended to emphasise a discourse around public service, particularly when placed in an international context. Writing about British

broadcasting legislation in an overview of television and public policy in a global context, David Ward uses such an ethos to characterise all radio and television in Britain:

“Until the 1990s, the British television system was a model of the steady evolution of public service principles originally set down in the BBC’s Royal Charter and then extended into the remits of the ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5” (Ward, 2008: 245)

Ward’s description of this ethos is underpinned by the BBC’s original model and that which pervades as a responsibility to its audiences to inform, educate and entertain. However, Ward’s account provides a history of British public service broadcasting that fails to make space for the idea that the BBC’s ethos manifests very differently within individual broadcasting institutions within the broadcasting industry. Ward’s history states that each British terrestrial channel “was allocated either a specific public service remit or some degree of public service obligation” (Ward, 2008: 245). However, there is again a lack of specificity, not just about the extent to which these obligations are defined, but in the very construction of broadcasting regulation. The first section of this thesis will challenge such a historical narrative by showing where there are different definitions of public service within the British national context that depart from the BBC’s creative and social identity. While the BBC is a defining creative institution in Britain, as the literature suggests due to the BBC’s reach to the majority of the British population, this project shows that there are alternative discourses around public service that manifest through legislation, policy and statements made by those working within broadcasters.

In an even more recent and Channel 4-specific analysis, Simon Blanchard describes one of the “two faces” of Channel 4 as the “public service tradition within broadcasting, first developed by John Reith and his colleagues at the BBC...carried across the regulation, ethos and routines at the ITV Network from the 1950s onward” (Blanchard, 2013: 367). To continue to define all British broadcasters through the ethos of the BBC is to gloss over how these discourses of public service change over time, in reflection of the politics of the government legislating the industry at any one time. Rather than reiterate this historical positioning of public service at the inception of the BBC and Reithian broadcasting ideology, I instead use the first section of this thesis to outline the *difference* between the conditions in which British terrestrial broadcasters were introduced – what faults were perceived within the existing system and therefore what they were expected to remedy. If to be creative is to be useful,

then this section defines what use Channel 4 is specifically required to serve and therefore what it means to be creative at Channel 4. By examining the talk around comedy at the three tiers of discourse I examine, I ask to what extent comedy is useful to Channel 4 in terms of public service and how this compares to other types of Channel 4 programming, such as that commissioned by the Entertainment Department. This usefulness is how I determine comedy's alignment with creativity or with claims to commercialism.

The broad sense of a 'British public service broadcasting ethos' suggests that the operation of the BBC and the Channel 4 are both scrutinised by the same kinds of authorities with the same criteria of providing broadcast content as commercial broadcasters such as ITV and Channel 5. The assumption in Ward's rhetoric is that the overriding notion of television being a potentially beneficial medium permeates the institutional remits of all British broadcasters in the same way. I argue instead that the creation of each broadcaster through its relation to other broadcasters and the institutional organisation of creative practice and the creative labour force within each institution allows for a more detailed and thorough attendance to British broadcasting than is currently available. I argue that in fact the variations of these organisations' claims to public service, the ways in which they are regulated, the public service demands required of them and the various definitions of creativity are not just subtle nuances but are in fact, at times, entirely oppositional within a single creative industry.

Fundamental to Channel 4's remit is the provision of diverse programming and the active pursuit of television that caters to those in society that are underrepresented elsewhere in British television broadcasting. In January 2015 Channel 4 announced that it was to introduce new initiatives to address representation and diversity on screen in its programmes, in a charge to become the forerunners of fairer representation in British broadcasting and to show a "major commitment to leadership in diversity at every level of the organisation" (*Channel 4 Press*, 2015). Channel 4 has always had a remit to present programming that represented audiences on screen that were elsewhere excluded and the launch of the 360° Diversity Charter suggests that this is still one of its primary objectives as a public service broadcaster who must demonstrate their social purpose.

The charter states that comedies and drama commissions should include at least one character from BAME background (black, Asian or minority ethnic), LGBT (lesbian, gay bisexual and trans) or a disabled personal and entertainment programmes, such as panel

shows, ensure that at least 25% of their guests are female and 15% are BAME, LGBT, disabled or “another underrepresented group” (*Channel 4 Issues Strict Diversity Guidelines, the Independent*, 2015). Off screen, the broadcaster has pledged that the 15% of its work force that are BAME people, will increase to 20% and that it will invest in both on and off screen talent in their production and broadcast of the 2016 Rio Paralympics. As the sense of leadership in diversity suggests, the aims of this charter are constructed as of a particularly high priority for Channel 4. As Channel 4 Chief Executive David Abraham states in the public statement about the charter: “Diversity is baked into Channel 4’s DNA...[this] is an opportunity for us to change how we think about diversity and ensure that it’s at the very heart of everything that we do, on *and* off screen” (*Channel 4 Press*, 2015).

If diversity is at the heart of Channel 4 then it is with this stipulation of their remit that I address the discourses of comedy work that appear in the final section of this thesis and it is here that this thesis engages most emphatically with work in the British television comedy industry. The final section explores how discourses around what it is to make art and what it is to make comedy construct a sense of aspirational outsider-ness to comedy work in the context of the television industry in general and for writers especially. I argue that the sense in which comedy writers are attributed the vast majority of the creative credit for television comedy production excludes the collaborative process of production and the creative agency of those performing other roles within production, impacts on the sense in which there is an accessibility to comedy work.

If diversity continues to be an issue for Channel 4 and, as Abraham says, “there is still more [they] can do” (2013: 95), then can it be argued that a discourse of exclusivity, of isolation, of an inherent ‘funny bone’ that must be in-born, compounds the difficulty with finding diverse comedy programming. It is possible to look harder to recruit a more representative ratio of identities within a creative workforce, and to make clear my own position I believe this is a vital method that should be included in efforts towards greater diversity. I also argue that where discourses of artistry and creative talent are constructed as innate and fixed within an individual, there is an invisible but impactful issue on access that cannot be *measured* quantitatively through an industry study such as this, but can be *proposed* by this discourse analysis. If the creative onus of television comedy is placed emphatically on the primary writers of each sitcom or sketch programme, and such writers describe their ability to write things that are funny as innate, instinctive and un-learnable, then how is this work

constructed as accessible to those who do not already know how to write television comedy? If the sites of learning how to write comedy and then how to write better comedy are not included in the talk around how to gain access to the television industry, then is this kind of work not rendered inaccessible to those who have yet to acquire such skills?

Through the analysis of the documents and talk around Channel 4 that construct its creative identity, I foreground the furthering of knowledge around creativity within institutions and the expansion of and contribution to existing debates about the interaction of public service responsibility and commercial enterprise but removed from the preoccupation with the BBC. By directing inquiry towards Channel 4, this thesis expands upon these existing debates and uses the particulars of Channel 4's public service remit and not for profit, commercial funding structure, to explore more thoroughly the assumptions around British broadcasting.

### **Researching Discourse in the Creative Industries**

Research into work in the creative industries sector has brought about debates around the growing creative economies and the development of creative work through management structures. Much of this work has approached the psychology of creativity, such as Teresa M. Amabile's work into creative individuals and their behaviours, which aims to unfold what working environments best encourage those with the propensity towards creativity, to maximise productivity and harness the virtues of knowledge based skillsets (Amabile, et al, 1996; Amabile, 1996, 1997; Florida, 2001).

As noted above, other research around the creative industries has examined how the assumptions bred from these psychological studies characterise creative work in ways that become problematic for those who are without the cultural and economic capital to support their access into creative work (Banks, 2010; O'Connor, 2010; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). Hesmondhalgh and Baker argue that since the early 1990s this shift in creativity research, from psychological studies into economic driven business strategies, is part of what some critics call a growing festishistic rhetoric around creative work which has created unstable and exploitative working conditions (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011: 3). For

example, where Amabile argues that creative individuals require freedom and tend to work better when not constrained by conventional working hours or repetitive work on long term projects, Hesmondhalgh suggests that such notions of freedom create a precarious, unreliable work environment, forcing creative workers to incorporate looking for work as a secondary and unpaid site of labour and accepting demanding levels of work for fear of it drying up.

This thesis contributes to these debates around creative work, and it is this concern with the difficulties of creative work to which I here contribute new understanding. However, I intercept with this literature that operates from a perspective of the political economy, by answering how the discursive production of an institution and of creative practice, the talk around creative work, affect these more tangible environmental and economic conditions of creative work. I do so by analysing discourses pertaining to cultural value and suggesting where these conceptions of what it means to be creative within the television comedy industry have real life consequences for creative workers or potential creative workers, and the ways in which this is particular to television comedy in comparison to other television genres at Channel 4.

#### **Macro, Meso and Micro Level Discourses of Comedy at Channel 4: Tiers of Laughter**

As I suggest above, the three tiered analysis of Channel 4 offers a more complex and detailed understanding of how television comedy is talked about in relation to creativity. Section One of this thesis looks at the broad industry-wide construction of comedy as a generic category in documents that were composed with the intention of recommending improvements to the public service of British broadcasting. It looks at documents such as the government commissioned Pilkington and Annan Reports on British broadcasting to note where and how comedy is included in the recommendations in these documents. By examining the language used to describe comedy as a generic category this section establishes how such documents construct the cultural value of comedy programming within the context of British public service broadcasting. There is a sense in which its very presence within such documents creates a claim to cultural value. However, I am concerned not just with comedy as a present

and therefore valuable category, but with how it operates in the language within this legislation and in particular in relation to other generic categories. As I argue, there is a distinction of cultural value made between two sets of generic categories, that which pertains to cultural value and that which pertains to entertainment, it is with pertinence to the latter that comedy is constructed in the legislation. In this sense, then, I question the extent to which within legislation, the construction and operation of generic categories as they pertain to public service is the primary method through which cultural value operates and recreates the opposition between that which is protected by public service and that which is commercial, light and not to be taken seriously.

At an institutional level, comedy and entertainment were a combined department at Channel 4, commissioning sitcom, sketch programmes, panel shows and stand up programmes under the same departmental title. It was only when the head of that department, Adam Adler, left to run independent production company Objective that Channel 4's comedy and entertainment commissioning were divided into two departments, separating comedy programming formats respectively. In response to comedy's division from entertainment, Section Two explores first what those working in these departments say is particular about comedy work and comedy as a genre. As the Comedy Department only deal with sitcom and sketch programmes, this section also compares these particularities with the ways in which comedy panel shows and stand-up comedy programmes, that are now the responsibility of the Entertainment Department, are constructed differently, therefore showing how the organisation of cultural phenomena within a creative institution can directly impact on the construction of its cultural value depending on the perceived purpose of that organisational category.

Finally, Section Three examines talk around the individual level of the creative processes in comedy production, analysing interviews with creative practitioners about their work and where the broader discourses of creative value in comedy manifest as methods of distributing cultural value within the labour force itself. While there is a debate between creativity as ordinary in tension with creative workers as a specific labour force, I further this investigation into the specificity of what work in the collaborative process of television is called creative and is attributed, through such talk, with *the most* creative worth. As Williams observes where creativity as a process has been both overly celebrated and reductively dismissed, a polarisation which wrongly affects how we research creative work (Williams,

1965 in Hesmondhalgh, 2011: 60). As such, Williams acknowledges that creativity itself is, albeit an intense form of ordinary human behaviour and as such creative workers are also ordinary. However, Hesmondhalgh argues that there is a specificity to creative work and creative workers in their ability to communicate experience:

“Creative workers then are far more ordinary than traditional views of ‘art’ would have us believe. There is nevertheless something extraordinary about them. Their work is the communication of experience through symbolic production” (61).

My interest in this debate is not restricted only to the value of creative work or the extent to its exceptional-ness, but the ways in which the collaborative element of work in the creative industries might be rendered invisible by the onus placed here, by Hesmondhalgh’s discussion of Williams, on “the artist”. For this discussion of an invariably collaborative creative medium, we look then to who is identified as the artist – who has the greatest creative worth or value attached to their role? Furthermore, I argue that this onus renders specific types of work invisible and as such devalues the creative worth of aspects of television comedy work which, ultimately, has real life effects on the working conditions of such roles.

With regards to this argument within the case study of Channel 4, it is important to note that as these practitioners work in production across broadcasters I cannot suggest that what they say about comedy production is in any sense unique to Channel 4. However, by looking at how they characterise comedy work in general, I will place this talk in the context of Channel 4’s specific remit for encouraging diversity, developing new talent and allowing for creative experimentation which ultimately still allows me to draw conclusions about how constructions of comedy and creativity interact within the parameters of the conditions of Channel 4 noted in the first two sections. In doing, rather than suggesting these three levels of analysis as static and unique, this thesis brings these intersecting notions of creativity and cultural value together to show where these assumed truths about television comedy interact, conflict and overlap.

## Literature Review

### Cultural Value and Creative Worth

This project will be underpinned by existing theory in three main areas: creativity, cultural theory and television comedy. Each of these areas has its own range of research approaches and theories, so it is the aim of this literature review to establish where and how particular debates in these areas hold pertinence to a study of this nature, and highlight where common themes within these subjects arise. In doing so, I will also show where the findings of this research will intercept this literature, develop further understanding in these disciplines and point to future avenues for research.

This chapter seeks to outline debates relevant to the construction of creativity and comedy as discussed at three levels of the broadcasting industry: government legislation, commissioning departments and production. It might be possible to try and outline a single definition for how creativity is discussed across these three levels and in the different sites of discourse, e.g. legislation, online statements and interviews. However, the concern here is more with what previous discourses around creativity, those that conflict and also align, might be seen within the discursive construction of creativity within the context of Channel 4 television comedy.

So rather than state what, for this project, creativity means and then apply that definition, I seek here to understand how these discourses of creativity are used to construct a sense of *cultural value* and *creative worth* in these three sites. Both the terms will be informed by several common distinctions informed by cultural theory within the context of popular culture. I adhere then to the position that cultural hierarchies are constructed within popular culture forms via the operative distinctions made around quality, social and public service and mass consumption.

However I do outline the distinction between cultural value and creative worth, as they are applied in this analysis. As the social purpose of Channel 4 is defined and justified through

the fulfilment of its public service remit, cultural value, and the presence thereof, will be perceived through the description of the adherence to the parameters of that remit as outlined in Section One. For instance, the ways in which the Comedy Department is said to fulfil Channel 4's remit will be evidence then of cultural value within this thesis. However, particularly in Section Three where I look to distinctions within creative labour in Comedy, any work within the commissioning, facilitating and production of such content would be said to be of cultural value. As such, I use the term *creative worth* to determine which elements of the creative process or certain roles within the workforce in this area of the broadcasting industry are said to be more important to successful creativity. So while there is greater cultural value placed upon the production of certain comedy formats, namely sitcom and sketch show, there are also distinctions of creative labour within the talk around the production of these formats that celebrate some creative roles as crucial and others as peripheral or even invisible.

Now I outline existing literature on creativity to provide a method and context for this study's analysis of Channel 4's creative identity. Since this study is concerned with how creativity is constructed within a cultural institution, and in particular one that is funded by advertising, the subject of creativity will be outlined in two ways. The first will be predicated by creativity as a process that exists unto itself in human behaviour and can be analysed in isolation from commercial or professional motivation; the second will address debates around creative labour, the creative industries in relation to debates surfacing through increasing interest in creativity as an advantageous business acumen through which to generate greater revenue in the knowledge economy. Once these two areas in creativity theory have been outlined, I will then bring in existing theory on television to highlight what specific conditions and assumptions of how the broadcasting industry works foregrounds which debates. This will acknowledge the value not only of creativity within this medium, but of the medium in general: the importance of creativity to television relies on what societal responsibility television is said to have with respect to creativity. In order to justify any interest in creativity within broadcasting, the importance of creativity itself must be clarified, but also the importance of television.

With these ideas in place, further studies into the measurement of creativity within programming itself might be suggested. For the purposes of this study, this literature will highlight the value of creativity, comedy and television and what established understanding

of these subjects will help reveal about industrial discourses within British television comedy, and the debates reflected in the practices of the specific organisational and institutional parameters of the comedy genre and of Channel 4.

### **Creativities: Industrial, Institutional and Individual**

The definition of creativity is often the most central and yet most elusive challenge of undertaking studies of the subject (Robinson and Koshy, 1990: 68). This is partly because of the variety of approaches in the literature: distinct separations are made between studies of the creative person, the creative process and the creative product as sites for investigation and different methodological approaches are applied to these three areas. These investigations also have varying philosophical and pragmatic motivations, in pure theory, education, marketing, the creative industries, advertising and broad notions of social progression.

However, before describing the approaches that have so far been used to study creativity, one issue with the attention I give to some of the following literature must be addressed: I will be using theory on creativity that does not acknowledge the broadcasting industry, in order to study how creativity is discussed *within* the broadcasting industry. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, while there has been increasing academic interest in the creative industries which does include broadcasting, the literature on the creative individual, creative processes and the measurement of a product's creativity fails to include television in the analyses. As I will explain below, it is my intention to posit the study of creativity as an experienced process into theory on creative industries, as these two areas have remained largely separate in past research. This is in part due to the assumption in the former of creativity as a unique and unusual thing (Weisberg, 1986, 1993), whereas the latter emphasises the potential creativity in all people and all work, which can be encouraged by environmental factors and management systems (Florida, 2014). So to address studies of the creative person, process and product is essential for a full examination of discourses around each of these sites for identifying creativity, within the talk around Channel 4 Comedy as a genre and as a practice.

Secondly, within these studies I will highlight some of the issues and assumptions made in the construction of creativity that will echo those in television and comedy studies but have which to be applied to their production practices. What's more, by using discourses that have until now positioned creativity in the realm of 'high art' rather than popular culture, a case can be made for examining creativity within popular culture in general, and television comedy in particular, as a method of resisting the cultural hierarchies upon which creativity research is dependent. As such I argue for more attention to the operation of cultural hierarchies within popular culture phenomena.

As an industry engaged with mass distribution, concerns around broadcasting as a form of cultural production have been associated with large scale political and institutional hierarchies, competition, sales and profit-making, technological advance, and specialisation (Attalah, 2003: 101). However, within these industrial systems a creative product must be generated. For this to occur the small scale creative process must be enabled, perceivable newness must be achieved and the purpose for which the product is designed must be met: for Channel 4, this purpose is tied to its creative identity and defined by its public service remit. Ultimately the institutional management practice and the creative activity must work in tandem to serve their respective purposes; enough of these creative processes must be successful for the institution to be successful; the audience must approve of the creative outcome enough to keep watching often enough to state that these processes have been creatively successful. The creative industries have been an increasing site of interest for the study of creativity whereas traditions of creativity research have focused much more on the minutiae of how we define an instance of creativity or the individual through which the creative inspiration comes to be realised. This study aims to acknowledge the tension between the understanding of the small scale creative activity within the context of broadcasting as an industry, to highlight debates that appear in these approaches and note similarities and differences between the two.

The examination of creative processes with reference to creative industry practice by British public authorities has increased over the last 30 years. This interest is underpinned by the increasingly significant contribution that the creative industries make to the UK economy, an increase not unnoticed by British television comedy makers, as the quote from *Peep Show* at the start of this thesis suggests. As Jane Henry states in *Creativity and Perception in*

*Management*, there has been an economic shift in emphasis from resource and labour based industry to the creative and cultural industries (2001: 8). An emphasis has also been placed on creativity as a component of societal development and socio-political growth and stability, as it encourages “intellectual engagement, purpose, energy and interactive tension with others” (Fisher, 2004: 12). Marshall Dimock argues that it is necessary for leading authorities to acknowledge and prioritise the creative industries as “the prosperity or decline of nations seems to depend more on creativity than upon any other factor” (Dimock, 1986: 3). Dimock suggests that creativity is not so intangible that we cannot measure it and any assumption to the contrary would be detrimental (5). Instead, he argues that by understanding creativity and accepting that there are universal elements of it that can occur in certain conditions, we can harness the positive effects of creativity and foster its growth using public administration and other organisational systems. Such an argument for more research into creativity looks to the development of the British creative industries as well as the fostering of creativity in education, business and everyday life. As such, this area of investigation is underpinned by a design to encourage creativity within the institutions that permeate and manage everyday life in Britain.

However, this position neglects the specificity of context when fostering certain forms of creative expression and neglects the broader hierarchies that not only constitute discourses of what creativity *is* or what it is to *be* creative, but also how social and cultural hierarchies inform and are informed by the measurement of value in sites of creative activity and individuals' creative abilities.

This study seeks to outline how discourses around creativity operate within policy documents and talk about both comedy production and its position within the television industry more broadly. This is not to find a universal quality of creativity, as Dimmock suggests, but to look at what the understanding of comedy and creativity means within the parameters of Channel 4's public service remit. In the interests of specificity, rather than universality, I look to the discourses that operate around television as a mass medium, comedy as a generic category and the roles of production within the creative identity of Channel 4. With these discourses and those in the literature, in mind I will firstly examine that smaller scale creative process, one that is concerned with the creative individual, the creative method and the perceivable outcome in a single given instance. Secondly, I will address organisational creativity, creative management and recent literature that promotes intervention and external facilitation of

creativity. Thirdly, debates around the relationship between creativity and commerce will be addressed, vitally, due to Channel 4's public service cultural value and the ratings based advertising revenue through which its funding structure operates.

So what do we talk about, when we talk about creativity? There are a number of terms associated with identifying creative phenomena that recur in existing literature and are approached, applied and valued with different degrees of priority depending on the discipline within which they are discussed. One of the presiding themes recurring in the academic research and in government reports on creativity is the difficulty with defining the term 'creativity' itself (Robinson and Koshy, 1990: 68). Robert Fisher describes this dilemma: "the trouble with creativity, as with all intelligence and other brain based functions, is that the concept is ethereal and elusive" (Fisher, 2004: 7). In much of the literature on creativity as an activity, it is described as intangible, unknowable and mercurial (Feist, 2010: 113).

While studying the ways in which scholars have previously chosen to define the subject of creativity, most arguments have, explicitly or otherwise, fallen into three categories. Summarising this in *Creativity in Context*, Teresa M. Amabile names these different modes of analysis as looking at the creative person or persons, the creative process, and the creative product (Amabile, 1996: 19). Mark Runco makes the addition of how the creative outcome might be distributed, or "press", as a potential site for affecting the measurement of an artefact's creativity (2004). This type of division is common to how creativity has so far been assessed and clarifies a need to separate distinct areas for analysis in this 'intangible' topic. Plucker and Makel argue that within these separate disciplines occur opposing semantics and frequent variation in how we understand creativity. They argue that it creates barriers between research methods, that some authors have avoided defining the term altogether, and furthermore that "those outside the field become distanced because it appears no one in the field can even define creativity" (Plucker and Makel, 2010: 1).

This concern with definition can be seen in Hans Eysenck's criticism of philosophical studies of genius and creativity for being unclear in such a way: "words like 'imagination', 'insight' and so forth are sprayed about without definition, without possibility for measurement, without forming a testable theory, or even usually a comprehensible one" (Eysenck, 1995: 4). By such a quote we might imagine that a lack of clarity is inevitable in this kind of interdisciplinary study when a field combines different types of data and methods for

analysis. The consequence of understanding creativity to be ephemeral or intangible, then, is that it allows for a lack of clarity not only within the field itself, but even more so for those outside of the field looking in. This study seeks to understand the particular terms in which creativity is understood in relation to Channel 4 Comedy and the consequences for its work force of there being a rhetoric of creative spontaneity in the production processes of the genre.

Each study of the subject must begin by outlining in which parameters the researcher will be positioning their work, not just to contextualise the work in a broader sense academically but to avoid conflicting definitions from different areas of study confusing the very nature of what they are calling and assessing as creative. In the case of this study, it is exactly what the *use* of such ephemeral terms as 'imagination' and 'insight' tell us about what we assume them to mean. It is through the discourses at Channel 4 that will aid, if not a definition, an understanding of creativity within the context of British broadcasting and the production of television comedy.

Therefore, in order to seek out 'what we talk about when we talk about creativity', the different sites of analysis must be addressed. As it is the aim of this study to acknowledge that these different sites must exist in tension with one another in order for the creative endeavour to reach perceivable success, I will seek to combine analytical discourses that appear in the literature on creativity, rather than isolating and focusing on just one, to show how they overlap and depend on each other. As Albert Cook describes his method of analysing the many facets of how comedy functions "the point is to probe [comedy's] depths, not to chop it into portions" (Cook, 1949: 31). With this approach I will sustain this awareness of the interdisciplinary nature of creativity study, outline those sites that are separated in existing academic writing and seek to bring them together in the overall conclusions of this research.

### **The Creative Individual: Exceptionalism and the Genius Myth**

I seek here to highlight common themes in literature on studies that have foregrounded the creative individual as the key site for analysis when considering creativity activity as a

phenomenon and its relation to the ephemeral, the intangible and, in terms of creative skillsets, the un-learnable.

Discourses around the creative individual have historically often referred to their having been given a 'gift'. Creatives are described as unique, having distinct qualities and consequently having tendencies towards certain types of unconventional work patterns (Eysenck, 1995: 11). Runco and Albert source these ideas in pre-Christian views on creativity, associated with "mystical powers of protection and good fortune" (2010: 5). They go on to place the etymology of the term 'creation' in the realm of religion in relation to Boorstin (1992) and Nahm (1957): the Creation, by god, of all that we see in the world, "...from which followed the idea of the artisan doing God's work on earth" (5). These ideas describe the act of human creativity as god-like, a performance likened to the divine, and the powers of god and the power believed to have been bestowed by god upon a small number of those he made in his image. These exceptional chosen one were, in this description 'creative' people.

A similar non-religious but equally mythical discourse of exceptionalism underpins the unique capacities of the genius. Robert W. Wesiberg describes this discourse as the "genius myth" (1986), whereby it is assumed that creative achievement is the product of exceptional intellectual and personality characteristics in the individual. The genius, in this discourse or myth, is again unique and has a psychological predisposition unlike those of most people. It is in this predisposition where their creative inspiration and powers reside. When constructed through these discourses, it is easy to see how the creative endeavour might still carry the weight of being unknowable, unreachable and untouchable, available only to the few, the artisan, and the unique individual. However, I argue that the idea that the creative individual, as either *genius* or *artisan*, has a unique or divine gift which is inaccessible to the majority, places a barrier to creativity by positioning it as out of grasp and out of comprehension for the masses. I also argue that this is compounded by the idea that the creative author operates in isolation, rather than being facilitated by any collaborative efforts, as is argued by Jack Stillinger in reference to literary work in *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of the Solitary Genius* (1991). Stillinger points out that the tradition in which the literary author is constructed, and as such the notional authorship itself, is weighted by the singular creative voice to the derision of those editors, publishers and other collaborators who aided the creative development of a given work: he approaches the question of "how many authors are being banished from a text or apotheosised into it" when we talk about the literary work

and the literary author or, indeed, the absence or death of the author (v). I apply this to industry, rather than Stillinger's allusion to post-structuralist theory, but the emphasis on collaboration is still the same. The myth of the "solitary genius" reproduces assumptions about who might have the potential to be creative and exacts a hierarchical structure that denies the potential of the 'average' or non-exceptional individual, either as the creator or as the appreciator. This hierarchy provides a conceptual rhetoric that encourages those who do not generally identify as exceptional as unable to engage in that which is 'creative' and also denies the idea that creativity can be in some way taught or learned as creativity is "out of the blue" and unconscious (Weisberg: 1986: 13).

In *Creativity in Context* (1996) Teresa Amabile makes a case for studying the psychology and the conditional influences on a person's ability to create, which considers the idea of the creative individual more practically than the discourses above might project but which still attends to the idea that there are people who have a fundamental predisposition to creativity. Her examples of social psychologies of creativity are those of scientists Albert Einstein and James Watson, filmmaker Woody Allen, and writers, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and Thomas Wolfe. She describes each case of the creative individual, and highlights a common predisposition to rebellion (Amabile, 1996: 7-14). Stating that these examples are representative of the creative individual's psychology more generally, she argues that creative activity suffers under the constraints of conventional societal and working demands. According to this study, there are conditional circumstances that better facilitate the precondition of the creative individual. However, given the prioritisation of the creative individual's exceptionalism, Amabile argues that the introduction of formality to the creative process and the pressure and interference of outside influence, hinders the individual's creative impulse and stifles their passion for the process itself.

Her conclusion is that it is intrinsic motivation, the individual's desire to create, that is central to a creative individual's work, whereas extrinsic motivation, interference or outside pressure, is detrimental (1996:15). This foregrounding of the creative individual over group collaboration, environmental stimulation or institutional management is at odds with the idea of intervention as a potential catalyst to creative activity. The creative individual is again cast as an outsider whose unique psychological precondition requires isolation or, at least, autonomy from a group process in order to produce more work.

However, the shift in the literature toward understanding the environmental conditions that are conducive to the stimulation of creativity rejects this discourse around the creative work of the individual as being the product of isolation. Instead, the very motive for research into organisational creativity and the fostering of creativity is implicit of the assumption that creative work does not, in fact, act best in isolation from outside influence or, as Amabile suggests, extrinsic motivation. What is also highlighted is that part of this isolation is to struggle; in rejecting other types of work where the primary objective is not to create but to earn money, the bohemian thrives on uncertainty and an absence of comfort or luxury. This position will be examined below in relation to more modern assumptions about how best creativity can be financed in order to maximise the creative imagination and its process.

For Amabile creative workers are unconventional in their lifestyles and their creative activity, common in their peer group for being unusual in society. The association made between creativity, genius and divinity is reinforced here, charging creativity with being elusive but also highly desirable. From this, a difficulty with measuring creative skill emerges and ultimately an anxiety about its authenticity that is rarely addressed in academic studies of creativity. If an individual's talents are intangible, if their skill is immeasurable, then there is space to say that their pretence to creative skill, alluded to by such traits as Amabile's list above, might actually be a fallacy. Their desire for freedom from constraint, for isolation and for nonconformity is more a stubborn unwillingness to obey the societal demands that everyday folk adhere to, rather than necessary preconditions to their creative work. The suspicion mounted on intangible terms fears that the fraudster masquerading as a creative uses status as an outsider for the purposes of childish rebellion, for evasion of traditional forms of labour, due to, in essence, laziness. For every prophet, poet, jester or inventor, there is a misfit, village idiot, witch or lunatic (Torr, 2008: 14) and what this suggests is that while there might be organisation methods that facilitate or characterise creative activity, those conditions alone are not a sure sign that 'authentic' creativity is taking place.

In *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900-1939* (2003) Virginian Nicholson characterises how the bohemian exists within mainstream culture, positioning this type of creative far from the constraints of ordinary life. Here, the bohemian is the creative whose productivity and inventiveness is only ever hindered by financial comfort and social conformity. The bohemian's lifestyle is constructed as resistant to money and cleanliness and is characterised by alcohol, same sex and extra marital relationships and the tension between

“innovative” and “authentic” living (Nicholson, 2003: 99). There is recognition that doubt pervades some judgements of the creative individual, while there are some that position the bohemian as “the lonely genius”, others will imagine “untalented phoneys” (xvi). The measurement of the creative individual or the creative product has avoided this dilemma. The assumption is that while creativity is intangible, it can be certainly present, we know that we perceive it, we only struggle with justifying that assumption with qualitative measurement. This characterisation of creativity is in keeping with the fraudster, outsider and trickster - all traditional comic characters, exemplified again by Jeremy of *Peep Show* in the quote on the cover page of this thesis (King, 2002: 64; Stott, 2005: 49).

What is apparent in the foregrounding of the creative individual over the collaborative team is the assumption that where creative potential is authentic, it is the result of an individual’s unique predisposition and something that cannot be learned or facilitated by environmental or performative factors. The idea that the mere adoption of a ‘bohemian’ lifestyle is no means to becoming a genuinely creative individual reinforces this assumption. As the third section of this thesis will examine, there is the celebration of creativity according to the discourses of the divine and of the genius within talk around comedy work. However, there is at once a discourse of the fraudster or the disavowal of the creativity involved in comedy work active too, which reflects Nicholson’s analysis.

### **Measuring Creative Output**

“Assessment of creative products receives much less attention in the literature than assessment of personality, process, or even environmental variables, yet a case can be made that the ability to measure a product’s creativity is among the most important aspects of creative assessment”

Plucker and Makel (2010: 58)

As noted above, studies in the field of psychology have contributed to how we reconstruct the creative individual’s unique and predisposed potential for excellence and consequently what environments can accommodate such traits. While it is more the position in

contemporary creativity theory focused on management and organisational creativity that everyone has the *ability* to work creatively, whether in the creative industries or elsewhere, these assumptions about how creative workers are best encouraged stem from these ideas of deregulation and independent working - in essence, how to structure creative freedom. This will be addressed below, but first, how the measurement of the creative product or outcome is discussed in the literature will be outlined. By demonstrating the framework of these debates around measurement, the analysis of the talk around the comedy text in Sections Two and Three can be positioned within existing discourses around creativity which will inform my analysis of distinctions of cultural value and creative worth.

As highlighted above, there is much made of the “indescribable” nature of creativity in all aspects of its study. However, as Gregory J. Fiest points out, despite the insistence that creativity is difficult to define, scholars of all disciplines of creativity research that seek to measure the success of the creative *product* have been almost “unanimous in their definition of the concept...[c]reative thought or behaviour must be both novel/original and useful/adaptive” (Feist, 2010: 114). Other theorists echo these stipulations almost exactly: “[c]reativity is the interaction among aptitude, process and environment by which an individual or a group produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a social context” (Plucker and Makel, 2010: 49). What is evident here, is a shift in focus from the creative person, motivated by an internal, innate desire *to create* as Amabile describes, to the method, the environment and the context within which the result is positioned. However, the parameters of these context are obviously changeable depending on the phenomena in question.

Mark A. Runco and Garrett J. Jaeger review these tensions in their essay “The Standard Definition of Creativity” (2012), offering multiple terms for what they call original, but also places where originality does not reside.

“Originality is undoubtedly required. It is often labelled novelty, but whatever the label, if something is not unusual, novel or unique, it is commonplace, mundane or conventional. It is not original, and therefore not creative.” (1)

Here, Runco and Garrett highlight a problematic assumption for the study of television genres and in particular, television sitcom as creative. While originality is an accepted staple of

creativity and will be a term that informs this analysis it is troublesome to assume that that which is conventional cannot be creative. For a study of the discursive construction of cultural value there is a particular blind spot to the influence of existing discourses of what is defined as the “mundane” or “commonplace” within the context of cultural phenomena at large. For the study of creativity within popular culture, this thesis must move beyond this reductive notion of originality as one that cannot appear in the generic text.

The issue theorists have noted with the understanding of both sitcom and television is alluded to: that because television is an “everyday”, “small-time” or commonplace, it is not worthy of criticism, journalistic or academic (Attalah, 2003: 91; Mills, 2009: 1-2). In order to intercept this understanding we must look at the assessment of the second component of creativity, what is “unusual, novel or unique” within the television form (Runco and Garrett, 2012: 1).

Not only this, but how we might measure a creative phenomenon’s claim to “usefulness, fit or appropriateness” in its demonstration of originality (*Ibid*). In *Creativity, Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, Ciksentmyhayli argues that originality must, as noted above, be “useful” (1996: 30). Despite being a psychological study, his interest is also in the measurement of creative outcome: “[s]imply doing something differently is not enough to create value on its own: to be useful creativity must meet its purpose, and to do this its value must be judged or assessed” (*Ibid*). For the purposes of this study, the mode of assessment at least for that which is useful to Channel 4 and the ways in which its creativity is tasked by the specific parameters of its public service remit.

Kaufman and Sternberg also summarise how creativity is generally defined by these three components, stating that “a creative response is novel, good and relevant” (2007: 55-58; 2010: xiii). Here, “good” is refers to being of high quality, a judgement which distinguishes between value as context and value as quality as two separate sites for assessment. Again, relevance is the idea that context also refers to the application of the cultural phenomenon and the sense in which it provides a purposeful impact. What this also suggests, however, is that for such a value judgement to be made, there must be gatekeepers able to exercise an authoritative position in order to evaluate worth.

What is established within this literature is that originality judged within a perceivable

context must exist for the creative product to be measured as successful. For some, such as Ciksentmyhayli, the context is defined as much by the project's intention as its result. While the cyclical nature of this method of assessment relies on the connection between the purpose and the product, it also must be noted that they might be entirely dissimilar. It is possible that the purpose of a creative project is outlined in one way, when in fact what is produced by the process is something entirely different though equally as useful and as such the result can be both unexpected and successful.

What this points to, and what is most relevant here to the study of discourses of creativity at Channel 4, is the space for risk in the creative environment. It is problematic to assume that the creative individual must be able to predict what and how will make the process she or he embarks upon a success, as the creative process is described as the clashing of components that have not been put together before, in the pursuit of something new, different and innovative (Koestler, 1970). The innovative creative process, then, can be described as based in experimentation. There may be a hypothesis or aim outlined, but in the pursuit of originality, the potential to fail must be in some sense present. In turn, the creative environment is one that is denoted with the ability to experiment and to take risks, in pursuing something perceptibly original. The measurement of its success relies heavily on concept, but if newness, diversification and the progression of existing generic conventions are said to be the result of clashing previously unexplored spheres, as Koestler's bisociation theory describes, creative environments, as I will explore below, must allow for these clashes to be unsuccessful in fulfilling their intentions (*Ibid*).

I look now to theory that focuses on organisational and institutional creativity in public administration and in education and to how creativity, despite its risky, experimental production process, is argued to facilitate institutions. By outlining themes and debates around how creativity is thought to operate in a professional space or a controlled environment, the analysis of how Channel 4 policy and those that commission and produce comedy content describe creativity at practise level can be related to existing literature. While this thesis does not pick apart the practices through which Channel 4 shows itself to be pursuing diversity and experimentation in its creative workforce, this literature does point to the idea that the creative can be co-opted into the dominant institutions that govern British life and that creativity can operate under the hierarchies that constitute organisations whose primary objective is to generate profit. I do this in order to question this idea in

relation to how these two notions, the creative and the institutional, elsewhere in cultural studies might be said to be contradictory.

**"The risk to be different": Making Space for Creativity and Institutional Management**

(Fisher, 1990: 8)

The academy's increasing interest in creativity over the past three decades has long since been active in engaging public administration in the encouragement of creativity in society. "Those who have the most control in setting the congenial or hostile atmosphere for creativity - such as government officials - are primarily responsible for determining whether potential creativity is encouraged or otherwise" (Dimock, 1986: 5).

As noted, Marshall Dimock seeks to find a definition for creativity and look at how it has been considered in the past so that it might be better encouraged in the future and argues that this encouragement must be regulated. For Dimock, a public administrator, the success of creativity within a society is a result not just of creative individuals resisting or rebelling against conventional working environments, but in fact as a result of a society's influence through political and legislative frameworks (3). Dimock argues for an authoritative, organisational framework to these rebellious unconventional work practices (7).

The study of organisational creativity has accelerated in recent years, which is the result of a number of factors. As has been stated, the contribution that the creative industries themselves make to Britain's economic and social welfare has become increasingly discussed. The necessity for employing creativity in professional, innovative and adaptive forms of problem solving is described by Gerard J. Puccio and John F. Cabra: "[a]s society evolves at breakneck pace, organisations are forced to respond quickly, and those that are incapable of change are quickly replaced" (2010: 146). However, the interest in applying creative organisational techniques to work environments outside of the creative industries in the pursuit of ingenuity and more positive working environments has become more popular and, in turn, has inspired greater exploration in this area of creativity theory. For instance, the expectations that might be satisfied by creative or innovative work practice are beneficial for

the individual's work performance and their perception within their own institution (Yuan and Woodman, 2010: 325). Another reason given for this increased interest is that with rapidly expanding technological capabilities, the speed at which businesses have to cope with shifts in the economy and the fickleness of the marketplace demands more creative thinking in business practise (Henry, 2001: 7-8).

One of the links made between business practice and creativity is that they are both forms of problem solving and there is an increasing concern in the literature with 'creative problem solving' in both business and educational environments (Weisberg, 1986: 13; Weisberg, 2006; Carmeli et al, 2013; Shieh and Chang, 2014). By highlighting these debates around creativity in work and educational environments, it is my aim to investigate where this discourse appears in talk around Channel 4's organisational practice and in turn highlight assumptions around managing creativity and creative management within the specific site of comedy programming.

Dimock describes creativity, similarly to those noted above in terms of newness, usefulness and context, as "originality" and more specifically as "bringing something into the world that is relatively new and possibly revolutionary in its wide circle of effects" (Dimock, 1986: 3). He discusses the debate as to whether creativity is "inborn or...produced socially" and he makes an argument for creativity being a product of environment as much as an individual's personality and mental ability. There has been much attention given to the notion that creative work and creativity *in* work can be fostered and encouraged by providing certain conditions to stimulate and foster creative processes. However, this thesis shows that despite these discourses existing in the study of creativity elsewhere, this is now how creativity is constructed within British television comedy production.

Constantine Andriopolous outlines some of the literature that has focused on how exactly these environments best function and how organisational creativity can be enforced to optimise problem solving within the workplace. The five sites he outlines as "determinants for organisational creativity" are:

- (1) the organisational climate
- (2) leadership style
- (3) organisational culture

- (4) resources and skills and
- (5) the structure and systems of an organisation. (2001: 834)

Andriopolous discusses these determinants, summarising the view that democratic working environments are more conducive to creativity because hierarchies diminish creative work processes. Returning to the work of Teresa Amabile and the notion that the specificity of creative individuals requires specific working conditions, Andriopolous outlines necessary qualities in creative management stating that leadership should:

“balance employees’ freedom and responsibility, without domination...show concern for employee’s feelings and needs, generously recognise creative work and encourage employees to voice their own concerns, provide feedback and facilitate skills development” (2001: 834).

This summary foregrounds the key theme around fostering creativity: that freedom of thought can be facilitated by institutions that provide security and support to its workers rather than leaving them entirely to their own devices.

As suggested above, part of this security comes from an atmosphere that allows risk taking and does not intrinsically punish failure, one that “takes a long term view in order to tolerate a few mistakes” (Andriopolous, 2001: 836). This might also describe a certain amount of distance within an organisational structure between the management or facilitator of creativity, and the individuals whose work is defined as creative, either in approach or in product. This is particularly pertinent to Channel 4 as a publishing broadcaster. Arguably there is a greater opportunity for commissioners at Channel 4 to keep intervention into the production of content to a minimum. However, as Channel 4 is also charged with the development of new talent and the inexperienced creative author, intervention must be negotiated. Such a tension will inform how Channel 4 might identify itself as a free and self-motivating creative environment but also able to provide the skills involved in television production that are not part of the innate creative talent assumed by the myth of the creative genius. This analysis will in particular refer to the ways in which the management of creativity in the context of economic concerns, is a method of managing freedom within institutions that contribute to the day to day maintenance of social hierarchies. This analysis is critical of the ways in which this process of creative management might control the possible political

resistance of creativity, rendering creative freedom “a commodity increasingly subject to the laws of capital” (O’Connor, 2010: 7).

As is stated in the interviews with commissioners, much of their work in the Comedy Department is about problem solving: which production company would best suit this project? How important is the location manager role for this series; how do we make this ‘Channel 4’?. While this problem solving practice might seem suited to managerial roles, creative practitioners also talk about problem solving in their processes: why does the comedy of this character not register in the first scene? How do I get the audience to invest in this narrative from episode one? What is an appropriate response for this character to this situation?

For Andriopolous, there is a necessary amount of autonomy required for the individual to “choose how to go about achieving their assigned tasks” (2001: 836). However, echoing the originality/appropriateness measurement of the creative product, Andriopolous points out that this autonomy is loaded with the need for perceivable results: “[a] working atmosphere favourable to creativity and innovation requires participation and freedom of expression, but also demands performance standards” (2001: 834). Within Channel 4, this will be discussed in terms of the relationship between commissioners, who describe themselves as quite separate from the ‘creative’ workers at production level, and the writers to whom the creative processes of the comedy project are said to drive.

Creative phenomena as a result of freedom and autonomy has elsewhere been foregrounded in literature on educational institutions. Writing in *The Creative Age: Knowledge and Skills for the New Economy* (1999) Seltzer and Bentley argue that education now must promote creative thinking and capabilities at an early age because of the increasing significance of creativity to the British national economy. They argue that young people must be equipped with the skills needed to adapt to the “knowledge based” work that underpins Britain’s ability to compete in a global market: detailing a number of case studies they argue that “knowledge is the primary source of economic productivity” (Seltzer and Bentley, 1999: 9) and vice versa, “the rising importance of creativity is driven by the emergence of a knowledge based economy” (17). While the work found in this knowledge economy is denoted by a “fluid and unstable” environment (42) they argue that by combining this fluidity with more formal existing systems of work, can maximise resources in what Diane Coyle describes as a

“weightless economy” (Coyle, 1997). As with Andriopolous' argument above, they reinforce the idea that self-management and autonomy are vital for creative attitudes towards problem solving in schools as a training site for the work place. They state that deregulation, self-evaluation and peer support are key parts to a successful model of this kind. Once again, they highlight the need for an environment in which mistakes can be made and acknowledge that the freedom and security to make these mistakes without immediate punishment inform the incremental learning process involved with creativity (Seltzer and Bentley, 1999: 26). As will be shown in the next section of this thesis, this description of the management of creativity within existing institutional systems and an environment in which risk is part of the creative process is reflected in how Channel 4 talks about itself as a broadcaster with a specific construction of its contribution to public service.

These “necessary and sufficient conditions for creativity” (Fisher and Williams, 2004: 7) are echoed in *Unlocking Creativity: Teaching Across the Curriculum*, where editors Robert Fisher and Mary Williams outline the importance of creativity detached from policy makers' preoccupation with economic benefit: “developing the capacity to be creative can enrich lives and help to contribute to a better society” (1). So the purpose of fostering creativity in educational institutions is justified differently from Seltzer and Bentley's, in a more social context than economic.

What is consistent, however, is the idea that creativity occurs when a person or group is “out of [their] comfort zone” (28), in an environment where they have the “confidence to make mistakes” (19) implies that creativity depends on a certain level of environmental security, below the surface of this autonomous experimentation. Ken Robinson's work is sited, reaffirming the definition of creativity found across the spectrum of creativity theory, that it is “imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes of originality and value” (Fisher, 1990: 29). In this chapter, Fisher refers to these principles of creativity as “generation” and “differentiation” and argues that creative environments must allow for “the risk to be different” (8). For those managing creativity, then, there is a balance to be struck between freedom, support and application, which combines existing understanding of the creative individual, the creative environment and the measurement of the creative product.

Creative management theory, as echoed in work on creativity in education, highlights a significant development in how creativity is understood. While there is still reference to the

necessary conditions of freedom, deregulation and self-assessment on the part of the creative worker, as foregrounded in psychological studies of those likely to engage in creative work, a new environment where creativity is encouraged and accessed by a larger institutional framework is implied. Dimock, Seltzer and Bentley and Andriopolous argue that intervention into creativity, in order to provide leadership, resources, organisational culture and structure, is vital.

What is evident, is that using frameworks around creative work are championed in this research and the idea that outside environmental conditions can provide positive external influence on the creative individual's work processes where elsewhere "extrinsic" interference is seen as harmful to creativity (Amabile, 1996: 15). They argue that it is beneficial to creativity itself and to the understanding of creative work is a specific type that suffers under the constraints of normal working conditions and motivations. What I point to here, is the discourse within creativity research, although not a universal one, that creativity can and should operate within traditional institutional structures and that the ways in which these institutions can encourage creativity can contribute to Britain economically.

### **British Broadcasting and Labour in the Creative Industries**

In amongst the celebratory rhetoric around the growing creative economy, part of the concern raised around the increased economic value of the creative industries is the potential for creative labour forces being exploited in the interests of Capitalist endeavour (Banks, 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008, 2011; Siebert and Wilson, 2013). The source of this concern recognises that although the idea that creative work is immensely desirable and even utopian (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008: 2) for its claims to freedom and unconventional work spaces, this desirability opens up the opportunity for companies and organisations to exploit workers trying to gain access to full time employment. The exploitation of workers is characterised by the tendency towards unpaid, temporary or part time work which is rationalised both by the discourse of creativity and freedom but also the assumptions outlined in the first part of this chapter that creativity is spontaneous, intangible and unpredictable.

While these claims often reach across notions of how creative and cultural work is broadly characterised, David Lee specifically addresses what he calls the discriminatory nature of the British independent television production sector, of which Channel 4 has, in its history, been the foremost commissioner. He argues that getting into creative work in this industry relies heavily on networking, which, characterised by social and informal communication, “favour[s] individuals with high levels of cultural capital” (Lee, 2011: 551). Lee argues that with the increase in freelance and project based work these labour markets are “insecure”, “informal”, “highly casualised” and that building networks is often an exercise brought about by the “uncertainty” of workers’ employment and as a manner of increasing their cultural capital to improve the likelihood of future work (2011: 552). Lee describes the British television production sector as a place where the free exchange of labour inhibits the sense of security available to its creative workers. Referencing J. Langham's study on working in British film and television, Lee states of these industries’ that “advertising positions is rare and curriculum vitae are rarely used” (Lee, 2011: 556).

Lee states here that when the freedom and unrestricted processes that are thought to be conducive to the creative endeavour are introduced in an industrial setting, networking becomes the primary avenue for ensuring job possibilities. However, what he ultimately suggests is that the ways in which networks function informally, creates a barrier of access to anyone without high levels of social and cultural capital. The initial limited financial rewards that are offered in these industries, combined with the need to perform social and cultural capital, consequently leads to an environment in which “individuals from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds find it very difficult to survive” (Lee, 2011: 556).

What Lee’s article points to, is the negative consequence of constructing creativity as an immeasurable quality in a worker: while creative skill within the broadcasting industry is clearly desirable, the intangibility of creative-ness encourages a greater dependency on social skills and cultural capital in proving to potential employers that someone is qualified to gain creative work. What this might suggest for the key questions of this study is that as a result of assuming the ability to work in the creative sector is not tangible – it is divine, spontaneous, unconscious – creative work is distributed based on the experience and social network that a worker can build in their professional environment not, as other industries might consider, the skills that are required for the job which can be described through a CV,

for example.

This concern with access to cultural work is where this thesis positions its primary interventions. It is also important to acknowledge this debate as it so directly addresses Channel 4 as an institution that relies entirely on publishing of independent production. However, the epistemological approach to Lee's analysis is different to the one I employ here and as such yields a different perspective of conclusions. Lee uses in depth interviews with freelance workers to find primary empirical evidence for difficulties with gaining access to work in independent television production by taking their explicit description of such difficulties. Where this thesis contributes new thought to this debate is through its methodological perspective, which understands these micro level constructions within the creative industry of British television comedy, with the broader industrial discourses that encompass all genres, and ultimately reflect the broad notion of cultural value as it can be applied to popular culture. That is, I argue that the barriers that Lee points to are not just constructed around trends of behaviour, but more specifically through the discursive construction of such distinctions of power. So I will be looking at this debate that reflect more implicitly how creative workers construct the industrial and institutional systems Channel 4 Comedy operates within, and what discourses emerge about the consequences of these conditions on the creative work within Channel 4's comedy production for those that have gained a significant standing in the industry.

In addition to the issue outlined here with access to work in the creative industries, another debate central to discussions of organisational creativity and the creative industries in Western Capitalist economy is that which considers the balance between the freedom of resources in the creative process and the financial limitations placed on projects to minimalise profit loss. As far as the characterisation of creativity as a site of risk is concerned, the risk in this context is not only that the creative work won't be successful in gaining critical or audience reception, but that it will lose money for those who seek to make a certain amount of money back on the project: there is creative risk and there is financial risk.

As public administration, business management and education have recognised this debate, the argument has arisen that a vital part of an environment that fosters creativity is one that provides sufficient resources so that the creative imagination is not limited by practical consideration. "Sufficient resources" are described by Amabile, Burnside and Gryskiewicz as

essential to the creative environment with particular reference to funding, whereas resources elsewhere are described by Puccio and Cabra as environmental conditions such as allowing for risk, the ability to make mistakes and institutional structure, as well as providing financial support (Puccio and Cabra, 2010: 152).

Min Basadur calls “limited or invisible funds” a significant barrier to creative work and the security implicit in contracted salaries and benefits are described by Soriano de Alencar and Burno-Fario as important to creative workers. However, nowhere does it state that the larger the budget the greater the creative achievement; these theorists are not championing a glut of resources for creative work. Rather there is a common belief expressed that where a creative idea and purpose can justify the acquisition of a resource, it should be made possible by industrial and institutional frameworks to obtain it, or the creative endeavour will be lost.

What, though, of the discourse that creativity in fact thrives in an environment of poverty, struggle and in itself fostered in the act of overcoming such limitations? As I have highlighted in discourse around the creative individual, there is a clear gap in the recent literature on creative environments that suggests not just that economic motivation is detrimental, but that invention is actually better bred of deprivation or poverty. This trope of the creative individual is seen in historical discourses of the struggling artist of the early twentieth century and of Romanticism, the bohemian that rejects the limitations of Capitalist interest and embraces sacrifice (Nicholson: 2003). But while this figure is missing from recent literature, there is an echo of this discourse in the literature that describes economic motivation as detrimental to creative activity. Instead traits of this character permeate contemporary constructions of creative workers, but are absorbed into industrial contexts of creative production rather than as in any sense of ‘pure’ creative activity or a lack of necessity for institutional and economic stability.

So the idea that deprivation is in fact conducive to creative activity might not be included in the literature around organisational creativity – and why would it be if the very notion of organisational creativity is defined by facilitating creative work through resources – there is still a great extent to which creative work is described as unique, in that it suffers when generating profit becomes the main objective rather than a secondary outcome. So for Channel 4, how do these tropes of creative workers as resistant to financial motivation, whether diluted in the contemporary literature or not, operate within a mass media

organisation that requires advertising revenue in order to exist? Where does creativity in Comedy sit when commerce is inevitably a concern for the institution at large?

Where more recent research looks to the operation of creativity within institutional systems, I wish next to position this in light of the stance that neo-Marxist thought takes within Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of the Culture Industry which views creativity with commercialism as oppositional rather than compatible. The emphasis on the economic benefit of containing creativity within established institutions of education, training and business, could certainly be said to benefit the established systems that arguments around hegemony, which will be detailed further below, would suggest that these institutions depend upon and reconstruct. By looking at how creativity is understood to operate within the construction of Channel 4 Comedy and within a highly regulated public service broadcaster, I argue that there will ultimately always be a reliance and evidence of traditional hierarchical systems of power and that these systems of power can be seen to be operative within the value judgements placed upon comedy forms.

### **The Culture Industry: Comedy and Mass Media**

This conflict between creativity and commerce is one of the bases for the vast cultural studies literature that has battled with the debates around cultural phenomena, power, hierarchies and Capitalism. This tension is outlined most famously in Adorno and Horkheimer's essay *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment and Mass Deception* (1944). From this perspective, there are two delineates of culture – that which is progressive and socially useful and that which is mass produced, mass distributed by the Culture Industry, to a passive mass audience. As such any mass culture, which would today include television, serves only to further the normative messages that reconstruct distinctions of power within a given society and reflects such messages through two characteristic aspects of homology and predictability (Storey, 2013: 64).

This study, however, seeks to look within popular culture to examine where discourses of value around culture are applied by those working within the television industry. Adorno's derision of television in his later applications of the Culture Industry, determines all genres

as equally lacking in cultural and social value: “light comedy, westerns, mysteries, so-called sophisticated plays and others” (Adorno, 1991a: 168). While this thesis intends not to *make* value judgements but to *observe* them within the language of the television industry, the specific devaluation of cultural forms by the description Adorno and Horkheimer build does directly inform the apparent division of that which is creatively worthwhile at Channel 4 and that which is commercially beneficial through its wide audience appeal, as will be shown in Section Two of the analysis.

This theory around culture is concerned not just with the quality or use of the cultural text but with the effects of mass culture on audiences, accusing the Capitalist agenda of generating such culture as a method of dehumanising the consumer. The consumer is preoccupied with the “exchange-value” of buying and consuming culture rather than the cultural phenomenon itself. Adorno uses the commercialisation of the music industry to vilify the pleasures of recognition as a replacement for artistic value, describing mass culture as “standardised” and the cause and evidence of audience’s “declining taste” (Adorno, 1938: 271-272). The creative product itself, he states, “experience[s] constitutional changes...become[s] vulgarized” (281). This thought also speaks of the creative worker as one that becomes part of a mechanical process, alienated from the cultural product and compromising the individuality needed for creating useful cultural phenomena (Swingewood, 1977). Usefulness here, is a stand in term for how I will examine creativity for Channel 4.

There is also a concern that as mass media removes the individuality of the public it addresses, there is a merging of taste and that each cultural product is standardised and consumed interchangeably with any other. This ease and access to consumerist behaviours of mass produced and standardised media, then, de-radicalises the public, removing “strong independent social groups and institutions” (Swingewood, 2007: 10).

Examples of this kind of approach to television sitcom in Adorno’s more recent writing on the Culture Industry, outline several examples of how storylines in comic narratives and the characterisation of the protagonists operate as “hidden messages” that reproduce social distinction between rich and poor. In one instance, quoted in John Storey’s *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (2013: 65), Adorno describes an American sitcom where a schoolteacher is so badly paid that she is literally starving and so must play tricks and inventively try and thief food from various sources. According to Adorno, the humourous and witty character of the schoolteacher elicits not outrage at this working woman’s poverty, but laughter and

compliance in the subjugation of the poor on screen “without being made aware of the indoctrination” (Adorno, 1991a: 167). It is the humour and quick wit of the protagonist in the face of her adversity, her wisecracking and her clever scheming that renders her poverty not tragic or unjust. Instead she is heroic, not only “above material privations, but also above the rest of mankind” (Ibid). Another example Adorno uses is as follows: a woman writes three potential heirs into the will of her cat, Mr. Casey. When the cat dies, the three heirs each try to prove their relationship with Mr. Casey, in pursuit of the inheritance, only to find it to consist of the cat’s toys. On throwing the worthless toys into an incinerator, the heirs discover that there was a hundred dollar bill placed in each toy and scrabble to get them out of the fire. The hidden message within this text that, Adorno states, intends to maintain social control over the masses, is “don’t expect the impossible, don’t daydream, but be realistic” – in essence, be happy with your lot and that which you are allowed elite to have. The competitive, dishonest and undignified behaviour of the heirs compounds this message with the idea that “[those] who expect that money will fall to them from heaven...are at the same time those whom you might expect to be capable of cheating” (1991a: 168). For Adorno, the comedy of these hidden messages is rendered coercive rather than explicit through the humour of the scenarios and the characterisation of the protagonists either as aspirational wits or cautionary fools. While this is clearly in keeping with the idea that all mass media messages reinforce social control, it additionally states that comedy, at least in mass media form, cannot be used to as a method of subversion. For Channel 4 Comedy, this of course would mean that it would be fundamentally impossible to commission progressive, innovative content, to challenge expectations or to provide an alternative perspective to that offered by other broadcasters. So it is important here to refer to debates around comedy and television comedy in particular as a resistant form of popular culture, which can draw attention to social control and in doing so contribute to cultural and potentially political dissent.

The lens of the Culture Industry remains, however, a difficult standpoint from which to analyse hierarchies of cultural value *within* the television industry. As indicated, television as an entire medium would come under the category of that which is manufactured by the Culture Industry and thus serves only those in positions of existing power and privilege. However, the theory outlined by Adorno and Horkheimer, I argue, underlies these cultural distinctions that operate within sites of popular culture production and distribution. As I argue, commercialism and creativity, or cultural value, are still diametrically opposed within

the talk around Channel 4 comedy production. However, rather than oppose these constructs as “authentic” culture versus that of “the Culture Industry”, the distinctions are made around culturally valuable generic classifications – those which fulfil Channel 4’s public service remit and those which serve its commercial funding structure.

Furthermore, rather than reconstruct the idea that workers within a creative industry that produces content for mass consumption are necessarily homogenised or mechanised as Adorno and Horkheimer’s model suggests, I use the way in which workers are characterised within talk about these types of comedy production to further evidence how distinctions of cultural value still operate within the themes highlighted by the Frankfurt School. These generic distinctions are characterised not only by emphases on either cultural value or monetary worth, but are further compounded by discourses of individual creative workers, artists and authors and homogenised production teams. Finally, I also use these characterisations of creative work to observe distinctions within the culturally valuable generic and departmental category of Comedy with a capital ‘C’.

Ultimately this thesis does look critically at the discourses that construct and justify value judgements about different comedy forms, but not from the perspective of the Culture Industry as an impossible site for creativity.

### **Television, Comedy and Cultural Status**

What stands out in studies of both the medium of television and the genre of comedy is the overcoming of the assumption that neither of these categories are complicated or serious enough to be interrogated by academic research. Rooted in the criticism of mass media forms in the Frankfurt School and media effects theory, television studies is an area interested not only in the examination of television programmes as texts but in criticism of popular culture as simultaneously superficial and banal and also dangerous and threatening. Such suspicions around television extends also to television studies: “[t]here is a sense in which television and everything connected to it is seen as unworthy: unworthy certainly as a serious intellectual pursuit, unworthy as a source of ideas or of stimulation, unworthy of critical evaluation, unworthy even as a pastime” (Attalah, in Morreale, 2003: 91); “neither ‘society’ nor the academy agrees even that it should be studied” (Allen, 2004 in Casey et al,

2008: ix). In turn, the comedy genre is talked about as a small time research area whose perceived lack of cultural value is used to explain the lack of extensive, rigorous analysis within the academy (Mills, 2009: 1).

Television as medium and comedy as a genre both experience cultural hierarchical struggle, to the extent that even when one is being considered seriously, the interception of the other into the debate seems to bring the significance of the research into question once again. One has the effect of re-trivialising the other upon its introduction: when television is being discussed in terms of socio-political impact or aesthetic form, the emphasis is placed on drama production, documentary or news programming and when comedy is theorised, there has only recently been an interest in its television format, historically privileging theatre and film as sites for serious consideration.

Paul Attalah argues that the difficulty academia has had with taking television comedy seriously is a direct consequence of how comedy and television are seen as “everyday” sorts of entertainment and so “unworthy” of analysis (Attalah, 2003: 91). It has been rejected as ‘low art’, lacking in the sophistication and artistic requirements of the dramatic narrative and “plays second fiddle to tragedy” (Mills, Ed. Creeber, 2013: 74). Describing assumptions made about comedy in cinema, Geoff King argues that generally, with the exception of some satirical and black comedy, the genre is one that is “safe”, “light relief” and “just entertainment” (King, 2002: 2). If we take Runco and Garrett’s suggestion, noted above, that creativity cannot exist without originality and that anything “commonplace” or “conventional” cannot be original, it is easy to see why there is a gap in the literature, particularly on creativity, where television comedy is concerned. The idea that comedy on television is an unchallenging art form, unchallenging for the artist and for the audience, is one which I argue is an arbitrary value distinction in order to consider the complex discourses that inform the choices and processes that occur in its production.

As Attalah says of television comedy, the everyday-ness is where these assumptions lie: the regularity and longevity of performing actions with the same consequences are used to deny profound cognitive activity (2003: 90). The ongoing nature of the television transmission itself, the knowledge that the medium will still be there even if you have switched off the set, makes it a reliable form and something that reaffirms both our control (our ability to turn away) and our passivity (it is still active, eternal, relentless in its transmission) in the television experience. It is these paradoxes of television that make it such a potentially significant transitional object (Silverstone, 1994: 15).

For Silverstone, television's availability, its invulnerability and its dependability make it reliable, comforting and in turn addictive as it exists in "potential space throughout an individual's life" (15). He argues that television's reliability is constantly reaffirmed by the cyclical nature scheduling, the recurrent signalling of times of the day, week or year performed by news broadcasts, weather reports and soap operas. Television is active in the "creation and mediation of anxiety and its resolution" (16), comforting its audience by firstly illustrating the traumas and catastrophes of death, identity and morality, and then creating an ending to the narrative or the news item where regularity signals that the status quo has been resumed and no real change to the lives of its viewers has taken place: no real trauma has been experienced (17-18). Silverstone explores this activity as one that is regressive for the viewer but not necessarily one that reduces the viewer to an infantilised comatose state of inactivity and perpetual control, as Adorno and Horkheimer's Culture Industry imagines of mass cultural consumption. Citing John Thompson, Silverstone argues that the assumption that television as a passive activity renders the audience as totally passive "commits the fallacy of internalism...[inferring] that this product will have a given effect when received by individuals in the course of their everyday lives" (Thompson, 1990: 116; Silverstone, 1994: 137).

By outlining such charges made against the form and consumption of television and its audiences, Silverstone ultimately argues that television, as an integral part of our everyday culture, informs the routines, rituals, traditions and myths that shape our lives and that neither this role, nor the processes that allow it to be fulfilled are to be dismissed as uncomplicated: "the failure to recognise this multiplicity or to measure the extent of its contradictions lies at the heart of relative failures to understand television's role in everyday life" (132). Silverstone makes an argument, then, for more considered attention to the complex construction of television as a cultural medium and appeals to the kind of multifaceted study that this three tiered analysis of Channel 4 pursues. In doing so he accepts that such studies will point to contradictions within such analyses and it is with this approach to analysing contradictions and tension between sites of research that this project has been conducted.

As with the hierarchical consideration of creativity that I have outlined above, one that privileges the exceptional over the everyday, so television suffers the judgement as too

popular and too easy under “the assumption that what is ordinary, familiar and enjoyed by the majority of a population will probably be less valuable than what is enjoyed by an educated elite” (Casey et al., 2001: 280). This has been described as a discriminatory act against the style and content of television programming, as it tends to favour the “psychological over the structural, the personal over the political” (280). As these arguments show, it is the perceived easiness with which television is experienced that has been used to underpin this dichotomous devaluation: it is a rhetoric that both denies television’s significance and accuses it of illicit influence and dangerous media effects. It is easiness that is also used to deny the creative activities of watching and producing comedy that underpins a need for a study of this nature.

Michael V. Tueth echoes this relationship between the assumed regressive-ness of television and its potential for social influence and subversion in his work on sitcom. He says of the significance of television, “the new babysitter”, is as “culture’s primary storyteller and definer of culture patterns through information and entertainment for an enormous heterogeneous mass public” (Tueth, 2005: 208). With his description of transgressive television comedies in America, he describes the juvenility of Freud’s “exposure comedy”, which relies on “farting, vomiting [and] sexual activity” as “regress[ing] to the infantile” (209). Tueth contrasts these with Freud’s “innocent jokes”, those which provide simple pleasures in wordplay, illicit small scale amusement and do little else with their execution (208). Both these descriptions of body comedy and the idea of simple, small scale amusement again lend themselves to the discourse of comedy as inconsequential and as such open for dismissal as a cultural phenomenon. However Tueth does highlight other pleasures aspired to by television comedy, which serve a more political agenda, that of rebellion. Tueth highlights the ability for television comedy to “shock sensibilities” and demonstrates examples of how sitcom has “thrived on offensive attitudes, outrageous behaviour, taboo topics and the language of insult” (206).

Here Tueth points to two distinct and contrasting pleasures of comedy and in particular, television sitcom; the reinforcement of hegemonic ideology, in the representation of the family, contemporary life, the familiar, as well as the ability to resist the status quo: “television comedy allows [the audience] if only for half an hour at a time, the opportunity to imagine and enjoy alternatives to the prevailing ideology” (215). Where Tueth describes subversive comedy as a form of escapist fantasy, he also illustrates this subversion’s power to engage

with political debate within satire, and to evade political debate by pushing extremism into the realm of bad taste. It is in fact in the low cultural status that is argued of comedy that this subversive nature is said to reside as a “significantly radical social phenomenon” (Mills, 2013: 75).

The idea that comedy can operate as a site of political resistance and perform the revolutionary in a way that encourages revolt outside of a given text underpins Bakhtin’s description of the *carnivalesque*. In Bakhtin’s analysis of the comic Renaissance writer François Rabelais, he argues that the inversion of societal norms, through the image of the grotesque, the everyday, the festival and the banquet, within texts such as *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1873) sit outside of the kinds of cultural hierarchies that perpetuate societal, economic and political hierarchies. As such, it is the value-lessness that is vital to the breaking down of hierarchies through the comic text – to celebrate the cultural value of comedy writing, is implicitly to uphold the position of those in the existing state of authority to make such distinctions of value (Sobshank, 1996: 179).

In a study mapping discourse analyses in television comedy, the acknowledgement that one of the powers of comedy is to pursue the subversive, the different, the distinct and diverse, is essential to the recognition of how creativity is discussed with regards to these signifiers of creativity. More specifically, if there is a claim that comedy functions in a necessarily subversive way, what does the construction of Channel 4 Comedy say about the management and environment of such subversion within a cultural institution such as a public service broadcaster, connected expressly to governance and legislation?

The next section examines the political and industrial environment in which Channel 4 was brought about, and how ongoing discussions of creativity within government legislation and remits from regulators, have included themes that I have discussed so far. This will provide the context within which these discourses are interpreted within Channel 4 and, specifically, within its comedy programming.

For such an investigation into public and parliamentary debates around broadcasting, these key themes must be positioned within the wider context of British cultural studies. However, while it is vital to posit these three key areas in the narrative of academic approaches to the analysis of culture, the main site through which such theory will be understood is through

four political communications models offered by an article featured in the New Left Review in 1961: the models of authoritarianism, paternalism, commercialism and democracy (Coppard, et al. 1961: NP).

### **The New Left on Broadcasting: Channel 4 and the Democratic Communications Model**

This section will look at how the New Left's criticisms of British broadcasting in 1961 as a preliminary site of British cultural studies' repositioning of the definition of popular culture and its relation to audiences through different political communications models.

In its contribution to the Pilkington Committee's investigation into the Future of British Broadcasting, the New Left submitted the article "Television Supplement" to evaluate the broadcasting models that characterised the previous channels in Britain and offer a new political communications model for a new broadcaster. In this article Kit Coppard, Paddy Whannel, Raymond Williams and Tony Higgins outline a model for a more democratic addition to the existing television system, than, it argues, the BBC's paternalistic ideology or ITV's commercial ideology allow for. The recommendations outlined by Coppard et al, were not taken up by the Pilkington Committee at the time, in its design of what would become BBC Two. However, these recommendations would be evident in Annan Report of 1977, in its design of what a fourth service could, and should, be. This democratic communications system, as a mass medium and as a means of distributing popular culture, would serve as an early model for how Channel 4 would ultimately be designed.

In this sense, what was occurring in academic thinking and the study of culture will be directly related to the ideological undertaking of broadcasting legislation by means of regulation as each new channel was launched. Examining these systems of organising the production, distribution and consumption of cultural content, this section will show from which debates this alternative understanding of a communications system had emerged. Furthermore, where the authors of "Television Supplement" make potentially reductive statements about such communications systems or articulate ideas from which cultural theory has since progressed, bringing in analyses from different schools or theoretical perspectives will allow for a more in depth interrogation into such models found elsewhere in cultural theory. In

this sense, this section will be able to look at the broader overarching questions about culture and society: what we mean by minority; how we define 'mass audiences'; who 'the public' are; how culture and entertainment are defined in relation to each other, and so on.

This section will, then, use this New Left perspective as a starting point through which to understand broader ideas about culture and society rather than form a narrative of cultural studies up until the inception and launch of Channel 4. In part this is because such narratives have been written elsewhere and also in part because these narratives do not, and do not attempt to serve as definitive accounts of the cultural studies tradition (Turner, 1990: 6) as the origins of ideas are often illusory (Hall, 2008: 20). This article's framework, with its various offshoots into cultural theory past and future to its publication, will then provide the theoretical basis for the next section of this chapter, which will highlight the shift in language used to describe British broadcasting within government reports, and the change in ideological design from a paternalistic service, to a competitive industry and finally, with the construction of the Channel 4 Company in the late 1970s, towards a democratic system.

### **“Television Supplement”: Cultural Studies and British Broadcasting Systems**

By the early 1960s, critical thought around the politics of television content and its potential benefit to a pluralistic society were developing beyond the existing duopoly of the BBC's public service and ITV's commercial competition. While concerns over media effects were still evident in the continued government interest in legislative intervention in media content, cultural studies was moving towards analyses that considered different definitions of culture and in particular the effects or "uses" of popular culture. As Stuart Hall describes, cultural theory was addressing the "cultural turn" happening across Western societies, due to the expansion of the cultural industries, the impact this had on culture's significance to "all aspects of social and economic life" (Hall, 2008: 20) and how the pervasiveness of culture in everyday life had created a "proliferation of secondary environments, mediating everything" (Hall, 1997: 215). He cites three primary texts for the address of this cultural turn: Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1958) and E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the Working Class* (1963), and notes the shift

towards the attentions of studies of “culture” towards those that included that produced and consumed by the working classes (Hall, 1980: 16)<sup>1</sup>.

In 1961, and in the midst of this shift in theoretical interest, Kit Coppard, Paddy Whannel, Raymond Williams and Tony Higgins wrote “Television Supplement” for *The New Left Review*, an article which, in anticipation of the Pilkington Committee’s Report on the Future of Broadcasting that would be published the following year, would call to account what it described as the problematic elements of the existing British broadcasting services and recommend solutions for these problems, from a New Left perspective of culture and society.

In order to assess the existing crisis of quality in British television and to suggest ways in which that crisis might be remedied, they summarised four communications systems models: authoritarianism, paternalism, commercialism and democracy. In its review of these four models, it analyses the ways in which these communications models are political, mapping the changes in how audiences and producers are positioned within such systems and reflecting the changes in critical thought that reflected on such systems. Ultimately, the article objects, in its summary, to any extension of the broadcasting service that would merely be “more of what we have at the moment” and offers its description of a democratic model as an apt alternative (Coppard et al, 1961: NP). This description, as will be noted in more detail later, would include elements of financing, advertising, production and tone that while not quite enforced by the Pilkington Committee’s proposal for a second BBC service, would appear again when in the 1979 Annan Committee’s recommendations for a fourth television service, ultimately manifesting in the design of Channel 4.

### **The Authoritarian Model**

The authoritarian model is one that positions cultural content as “part of the whole machinery by which a minority governs a particular society”, distributing cultural content

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<sup>1</sup> While Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy* focused on culture attributed to the behaviours and consumption of the working class, Williams criticised his failure to distinguish between working class culture either as “typical attitudes, values and ways of life of working people” (Hall, 1980: 21) or as mass culture produced and distributed “by the commercial class *for* the working classes” (Williams, 1957: 30).

loaded with “the instructions and ideas of the ruling group” (Coppard, et al. 1961: NP). Like the Culture Industry described above, this system is assumed to be propagandist, the deliberate and systematic production of biased materials, distributed to the masses with the intent of explicitly maintaining the political ideology of those already in power. Censorship and restrictions of freedom of speech are key features to the authoritarian model, as the power of alternative messages to those distributed by the authoritative power are threaten the consistency and maintenance of the preferred social order. The minority in control maintains this order by denying any platform by which such messages can be questioned and reaffirms its power by “claiming, simply, their right to rule” (Ibid).

The cultural content in this mass communications model is uniform in its message, if varied in its channels of communication. Cultural content cannot be a site for expression, authorship or creativity, beyond which messages that are beneficial to the perpetuation of control of the masses by the ruling class. A system of monopoly, censorship and prosecution “exclude, as a matter of policy, alternative instructions and ideas” (Coppard, et al. 1961: NP). For the consumers, and for the benefit of perpetuating the dominant ideology, there is a common culture that addresses the masses as a unified and passive audience.

This model of cultural production and distribution is reflective of widespread discourses that address not only fears of standardised and manipulative media and the censorship of dissenting messages, but of the relations between minority and majority groups. Within this model, the minority are explicitly in control; they hold hostage the power to produce cultural material and the power to control cultural material that suggests any alternative view or taste. Here, it is the majority that are controlled; they are the passive audience, the infantilised receivers of instruction through a common culture. From this top down model of media production and distribution an explicit hierarchy is described, whereby political and economic power belongs to the minority ruling class and is withheld from the wider society.

For early Marxism, the ruling class are those in control of material production and so also in control of the messages within cultural products. From this, whoever is lacking the resources to engage in material production are those who are subject to the mental production of the ruling class (Marx, in Storey: 68). The Culture Industry has a cyclical trajectory: “the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest” (in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1972: 121). It is by this control over production that threatens the liberty of the audiences as autonomous consumers and renders the Culture Industry as a product and tool for those with greater economic wealth

to maintain a class divide. Through this system culture is “uniform” and “impresses the same stamp on everything” (120).

Such a description reduces culture to its production, re-establishing the view that societal dynamics of power can only be read as those with capital and those without, and furthermore where ‘capital’ is described only as monetary wealth. What’s more, such an emphasis placed on the production is reductive too of the audience of any such cultural commodity – the audience are rendered by the system and by Critical Theory itself as a mass of recipients of messages that seek to control them and are universally affective in doing so. Comparing the use of the telephone, where subscribers are able to play the “role of subject”, to the use of the radio, which “turns all participants into listeners and authoritatively subjects them to broadcast programmes which are all exactly the same” (122) radio broadcasting as a democratic system fails to empower the masses. For the Frankfurt School, any autonomy in the public’s tendency to enjoy the film, radio and television products of the culture industry, are “part of the system and not an excuse for it” (122).

This criticism of the use of culture, its modes of production and standardised content, to maintain an economic class divide is one that provides an explicit power dynamic of minority control and majority consumption. However, a similar power dynamic can be observed in the paternalistic communications model, whereby there is a *cultural* elitism. Within this model, the distinction is concerned with a select cultural elite on one hand and a majority who are culturally illiterate or less equipped to distinguish between which kinds of culture are valuable and which are not. The ways in which ‘quality’ or ‘high’ art is defined, and by whom, and how this is juxtaposed with ‘popular’ culture is a key concern for debates in cultural studies and for this project’s understanding of the construction of the creative comedy industry as a producer of cultural artefacts.

For the New Left’s analysis of the paternalistic system of communications this distribution of power as cultural knowledge and understanding is crucial. That is, the notion that there are those that know better as to what ‘valuable culture’ is and it should be their responsibility to programme culture accordingly, is key to paternalism.

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### **The Paternalistic Model**

While Coppard et al do not apply the model of authoritarianism to any British broadcasting model, it does state that it is intrinsic in nature to paternalism, a model described as “an authoritarian system with a conscience” (Coppard, et al. 1961: NP). As is noted in the article and elsewhere paternalism is at the core of the ways in which the BBC had been designed in the 1920s and press criticism that the BBC’s monopolistic broadcasting system, however benevolently described by the corporation, could not fairly address the wider public (Stuart, 1975: 131).

At the heart of the BBC’s mission as a public service broadcaster, to inform, educate and entertain, was the institutional responsibility to provide a service that was beneficial to the public and, in upholding that responsibility, decide on the public’s behalf what might be considered beneficial. It was the BBC’s first general manager, John Reith, who personified this paternalistic role and upheld the notion that there was a type of broadcasting that would be socially valuable to the British public and a type that would be detrimental. It was his opinion that he was able to differentiate between these two in a way that the public themselves could not: writing of himself in 1924 he noted “a high conception of the inherent possibilities of broadcasting” (130). He wrote in his diary that he had an intellect that should be developed, and that this was an uncommon gift: “strength of will may be developed; to some extent brains; but never intellect” (80). His individual paternalism within the BBC institution itself is well documented and he is referred to as “master builder” of the BBC in preface to this reflexive Reith quote on the BBC’s structural political system:

“The BBC might be considered autocratic or arbitrary in attitude or procedure...it had the courage of its convictions, it did what it believed was in the public interest... [t]here was no electoral process anywhere in the BBC constitution and procedure. The governing body was nominated, not elected; the programmes were compiled not to meet but antedate the popular vote” (Boyle, 1972: 251).

Reith saw the BBC’s role, then, as giving the public what they didn’t yet know they wanted, awarding the institution a consciousness around culture that is absent from those watching.

The article states that paternalism refers to the same dynamic of power and control present in authoritarianism, whereby an elite minority distribute messages that maintain an ideological status quo which is beneficial to them rather than the masses. However, the issue

arises when an institution is positioned as having a higher consciousness or constitution than the audiences to which it broadcasts: how does it maintain such authority? With authoritarianism, which claims its control, Coppard et al note the moral justifications often used to excuse the paternal authority's monopoly, its editorial control and more subtle censorship of content. Such justifications orientate around the notion that there are parts of society that are not only less culturally literate in judging the quality of programming if left to their own devices, but who must be protected from cultural content because it has the power to harm them.

The use of the word "paternal" itself is one that refutes objection to the authority, as for the role of father, to which "there cannot be any real competition" (Coppard et al). Implicitly, this role is one entrenched in a duty of care, in protection and of knowing what's best for the infantilised public who are in the system's care: in paternalism, the public are not informed or educated enough to know what they want or what is good for them, so it is the authority's role to distribute what they need, not necessarily what they want. For television, this division between "need" and "want" is central to the balance between majority and minority programming. That is, what the masses are inclined to watch in the majority, is bad for them, and what the informed minority are inclined to watch is the kind of programming that should benefit society through a process of enlightenment. Objections to the paternalist's values are regarded as "at best, muddle-headed and, at worst, as a kind of moral insurrection against a tried and trusted 'way of life'" (Ibid.).

The New Left writers make connections between this paternalistic management of content and a conservatism or conservatism that actively seeks to preserve a "tried and tested 'way of life'" (Coppard et al). As the authority makes decisions on behalf of the public, based on what it should want and what it does need, the notion of the public as an active audience that is capable of managing its own cultures is denied. The notion of the public as pluralistic, as having a diverse range of needs and of being trusted to identify this variety of needs is also denied.

This model is one that reflects the argument in early cultural theory, what Storey calls the "pre-history" of the study of popular culture in cultural studies" and uses the writing to express the cultural elitism that had existed prior to the "cultural turn" that Stuart Hall described (Storey: xxi). Matthew Arnold and F. R. Leavis' writings on the danger of mass production to cultural value are reflective of the fears around the mass production of cultural goods that was made available by the industrial revolution. They can be read as both a

reflection and a constructor of the anxieties around this change in cultural production which were also the subject of Walter Benjamin's often cited 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in which Benjamin considers film's "liquidation of the traditional value of cultural heritage" (Benjamin, 1936: 217). Benjamin's conviction is that when a work of art goes through the process of technical reproduction "the whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical and...reproducibility" (215). For Benjamin, the authenticity of artwork is tied to its historical testimony and through reproduction that authenticity in the original is compromised and overwhelmed by the reproduction itself. Through existence of the reproduction outside of the artwork's original setting, and its multiple existences in multiple places, the art is removed from the "fabric of tradition", the reproduction of the art overwhelms that which it reproduces and ultimately its authority is undermined (217).

Benjamin's fears focus on the ways in which the production and reproduction of art or culture on a large scale effects its authenticity and leads to a "shattering of tradition" (217). However, while Arnold and Leavis both position their concerns over art in the context of the consequences of mass production, they argue more to the effect that the quality of art, and literature in particular, should be in the hands of the educated and cultural literate elite. It is from this position that John Storey traces the evident rhetoric around public duty and social purpose that the next section of this chapter finds within the parliamentary material on British broadcasting.

Arnold defines culture as "the pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know...the best which has been thought and said in the world" (Arnold, in Storey: 6) or the process of "trying to perfect oneself" (8). For Arnold, that which can be called culture, is a specific pursuit of "sweetness and light" that can be distributed to the masses to improve their human development (7).

In turn, it is only the cultural authority, the minority, who are equipped with the knowledge of how to define such culture as "real thought and real beauty", "the best knowledge, the best ideas of the time", to make it available to the "inferior classes" (7). The masses are unable to determine such value themselves, and as such must, according to Arnold, rely on this cultural authority for cultural enlightenment, as they act as the "true apostles of equality" (7). Arnold constructs the distribution of culture as a divine and charitable act, one that is performed by a noble few for the benefit of the masses. This association with culture and divinity mirrors nineteenth century Christian constructions of human creativity as the specialist work of artisans, those who are closest to god and who are capable of the god-like

act of creating on Earth. He describes the touching of society by such culture as “the flowering times for literature and art and all the creative power of genius” and a when “society is...permeated by thought, sensible to beauty, intelligent and alive” (7).

It is by this criticism that we see the distinctions between what he describes as “culture” at odds with what he describes as popular or “anarchy”.

Arnold constructs any intervention or protest into this divine, caring and paternalistic distribution of culture as simultaneously foolish and dangerous: anarchy. Arnold does not distinguish between high and low culture, he merely distinguishes between all culture and “anarchy”: culture refers to the valuable human contribution, and that which is contributed by the masses is “anarchy”, civil unrest, rioting, or what “[liberals] call popular demonstrations” (10). This should not be allowed as it would threaten the “State in which law is authoritative and sovereign” (11).

Arnold is convinced that the status quo must not be challenged, that the traditions of culture, “so precious” as he describes them, are correct and moral, and the threat of opposition to such established notions of social value must be forbidden (11). In saying so he makes a stark divide between the established order and “the Populace” and it is this divide and desire to maintain the minority elite’s role in providing appropriate forms of culture to the masses that is the historical site of criticism that would come to establish the aims of cultural studies.

Leavis’ 1930 work *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* is one that is entrenched in this hierarchical distinction of culture that is either art, high in quality, social value and its intellectual availability, or culture that is low, which is everything else. It is his broader contention that those who produce work of a high aesthetic standard, are those who also hold high moral standards as central to the purpose of the work (23).

His assertion is that since the availability of mass produced cultural commodities have flooded the market, only a minority of society have retained the ability to identify what high culture is, and that it is the sheer volume of “bewildering” (15) perspectives in modern culture that has left the “average cultivated person” confused with little ability to perceive value (17). He quotes Wordsworth’s description of an “accurate taste in poetry” as “an acquired talent, which can only be produced by severe thought, and a long continued intercourses with the best models of composition” (Storey, 2006: 15). For Leavis, not only is there good and bad literature, there are very few who are still capable of distinguishing which

is which: “the critically adult public, then, is very small indeed: they are a very small minority who are capable of fending for themselves amid the smother of new books” (16).

The distinctions being made between Arnold’s “culture” and “anarchy” and Leavis’ cultural “minority” and “inferior” masses, reinforce both authoritarian and paternalistic models’ “organisation of society into two opposed social classes derived from their relation to production; the bourgeoisie, who benefited from the inequality, and the proletariat, who were impoverished by it” (Valentine, 2006: 55). There is a distinction to be made between the explicit class divide of authoritarianism and the implicit cultural divide of paternalism. However, fears around mass production and its influence on culture are, in this literature, at the forefront of how cultural value is defined and in how the power and autonomy of audiences is delineated.

Akin to these concerns around ‘popular’ culture that appeals to the masses, is the scepticism of commercial systems of broadcasting that rely on sufficient popularity with audiences to create profit and revenue for ongoing projects and financial and institutional stability. This model is rejected for its elitism and the pluralised diversity of Channel 4’s remit embodies the alternative.

### **The Commercial Model**

The 1954 Television Act was passed, in part, to enable the setting up of the Independent Television Authority which would regulate Independent Television, Britain’s first commercial channel (Lloyd, 1958: 165). The launch of ITV in 1955 changed the communications model of British broadcasting: from the BBC’s paternalistic monopoly, Britain’s broadcasting was now a competitive duopoly. As the next section of this chapter will analyse within broadcasting reports and government legislation, the shift towards a commercial system of broadcasting, while providing a sense of choice in television programming, did not necessarily break down notions of popular culture, or entertainment, as being of less value than that which is preferred by cultural elite.

According to the New Left article, a commercial communications system “at first...asserts its right to offer for sale any kind of work which it believes the public will buy”. Initially, this empowers the audiences in a way that neither the authoritarian nor paternalistic models

can: by choosing what they want to watch, the audience's agency as consumers is mobilised and popularity redefined as "the preferences of ordinary people". If a type of programming is what a majority of the audience wants to watch, then increased ratings will generate increased advertising levy. This financially empowers the favoured broadcaster to increase the volume and quality of their programmes, and this in turn provides the public with more of what they want.

However, Coppard et al argue that because the impetus for making content is competitive and motivated primarily by profit via mass appeal, this redirects the cultural production from "work which it believes the public will buy" to "any profitable kind of work or idea" (Ibid).

The model works not just on the financial sustainability of a cultural commodity, but the extent to its profitability: its ability to out sell its rivals and increase its profits by as large a margin as possible. This limits access into the industry from those with fewer start-up resources, but also, for those with access, the return on the product must be as fast as possible in order to compete in a free market. For the reinvestment of profit to be most effective, the broadcaster cannot wait for a slow success, it cannot wait for audiences to grow to like a programme over time, because this will delay the broadcaster's ability to reinvest and generate further profit.

Despite ITV's charge to create competition to the BBC's audience in order to increase the quality of British broadcasting, it is argued in the literature that within the commercial communications model, which introduces profitability rather than mere financial sustainability, it is quality that inevitably suffers. The privileging of organisations with either existing financial capital or the position to raise such capital means that broadcasting will be produced and managed by those with a limited cultural experience – that of ruling class, financial and educational privilege. The repeated pandering to "known, existing tastes" in production, used in order to speed up return, inevitably compromises experimentation and diversity within the commercial model. This positions popular culture within two definitions used by Raymond Williams elsewhere, firstly as "work deliberately setting out to win favour with many people" and secondly as an "inferior kind of work" (Storey, 2012: 4).

In terms of those with access to create communications products and to what cultural experiences these products might speak, commercialism "lack[s...a] seriousness and concern for long term growth." For the New Left, then, this model is just as privileging to an elite minority and immobilising of the majority as the authoritarian and paternalistic systems: "At first the commercial attitude to communications is powerfully opposed to both authoritarianism

and paternalism, for it asserts the right to offer for sale any kind of work which it believes the public will buy..." but ultimately this is compromised by the fact that the model in fact "concerned...with the offering of any profitable kind of work or idea" (Coppard et al, 1961).

### **The Democratic Model**

What is common to ways in which the New Left writers describe the first three communications models in "Television Supplement" is that there is an opportunity, implicit or otherwise, for a minority of producers to abuse the channels through which they distribute messages to audiences and in doing so cause harm to the wider society. The article argues instead, for a system that considers "the critical awareness of the audience, the sense of responsibility on the part of those who serve that public, the conditions in which the service is received and the cultural life of the society as a whole" (Copard et al, 1961: NP).

In the authoritarian model, there is a 'common culture', which is decided by the authority themselves and protected by limitations on freedom of speech and participation by the people. This is a common culture in the sense of the messages being reproduced, rather than one that benefits as many people as widely as possible. For the New Left, a common culture that serves as representative of the people – a diverse and interactive model of culture – must be present in any society that seeks to benefit the majority of its public. On writing Television Supplement, Coppard et al argue that "[o]ur society is artificially divided not only into social classes but also in terms of innumerable other examples of 'us' and 'them'". They encourage instead a broadcasting system that has "a sense of the variety of the audience, a respect for the maturity of people, and a sense of personal conviction" (Ibid).

This idea of diversity, variety and activity within audiences, is referenced in Williams' *Culture and Society*:

"A good community, a living culture, will, because of this, not only make room for but actively encourage all and any who can contribute to the advance in consciousness which is the common need. Wherever we have started from, we need to listen to others who started from a different position. We need to consider every attachment, every value, with our whole attention; for we do not know the future,

we can never be certain of what may enrich it; we can only, now, listen to and consider whatever may be offered and take up what we can" (Williams, 1958: 340)

And so the New Left summarise the existing problems within the British broadcasting systems, and lay out the aims and objectives for a new and democratic system:

"The present structure is dominated either by the 'commercial' voice of advertising, or the 'official' voice of the institution. What is needed is other voices, other faces, other interests, other interpretations of entertainment, other approaches to seriousness, other aspects of community life" (Coppard, NP).

As the term "democratic" is "notoriously prone to abuse" it is worth clarifying the ways in which the term is being used here (Hesmondhalgh, 1997: 255). This is not a system that relies on the notion of a majority vote, that is, while it seeks to benefit the majority, it acknowledges the diversity within such a public. In this sense it rejects the ways in which television was, according to Coppard et al becoming increasingly "formulaic" (Coppard et al, 1961: NP).

The notion that there is such a thing as a 'majority' audience to be benefited is removed – the ways in which 'us' and 'them' are defined by who will and will not like a type of programming is dissolved. Where an advocate of a commercial model might have it that to watch is to vote, and that that which is most watched is what is most wanted and most valuable to society, this system's interest in diversity is resistant to any common or popular culture in this sense. It seeks not to define the popular as any culture that will be liked by the most people – or be disliked by the least. The New Left's understanding of a democratic communications system is egalitarian, rejecting the notion that media necessarily disempowers the audience, promoting the opportunity for more voices to be heard in different ways or at least, in as many ways as can be imagined by society. In this sense, democracy here becomes a mass of intersectional minorities, opposing the authoritarianism that represents a single elite minority or a democracy that gives way to one dominant and identical "mass culture" (1972, 121). Again, this diversity empowers society in its opportunity to both consume and produce its own culture under two definitive components:

"that every member of society has a right to choose for him [or her] self what he [or she] will read, listen to or watch; and that every member of society has a right to contribute to what is communicated—that is, written, spoken and shown" (Coppard et al, 1961: NP).

The article does draw comparisons between this system and the commercial model, in that the democratic model moves away from the implicit allowance for authoritarian or paternalistic censorship and instead allows for the “right to receive” any type of message available – the regulation is dependent on what the public want or what they produce or, for the commercial model, what the public will buy. However, it is different from the previous three models in how the producers are positioned and what objectives might be enabled: “it is against authoritarian control of what can be said, against paternalist selection of what ought to be said, against commercial selection of what can profitably be said” (*Ibid*).

While perceptions of democracy might suggest that there is a possibility for a majority rule, and therefore a normative sense of a British experience represented, instead a democratic communications model attends to a more pluralised variety of societal and national identities. The democratic model therefore aims not to reproduce a dominant or normative perspective as concluded by what is most bought into, but to provide for inclusion and diversity in the production and distribution of cultural messages.

Here then, the sense of the democratic is in inclusivity, both for consumers and producers. As well as creating content that is representative of a pluralised society, those at the point of production must also be representative and so the model describes a cultural industry where different and varied voices can enter into the production and distribution of cultural messages.

The democratic communications model is one that defines “popular culture” as culture for the people, made by the people. While television, as a mass medium, holds difficulties for being made ‘by the people’, for the design of Channel 4 within the 1977 Annan Report on the Future of Broadcasting, this notion was embodied in its remit to seek out new and more diverse creative voices to write and make television. As a publishing broadcaster, with no in-house creative staff, the use and development of an independent production sector also fits into the remit to create a wider and more diverse industrial workforce. So this shift in communications models fed into specific elements of the broadcaster’s production system, how it prioritised alternative social identities and how minority audiences would be redefined by a terrestrial channel.

Though these elements came to be realised in the late seventies during the design of Channel 4, the mapping of these broadcasting models throughout broadcasting policy and the launch of new terrestrial channels and the sense in which Channel 4 could be perceived as a

democratic broadcasting operation, are clearly imagined within “Television Supplement” in 1961.

So what might the analysis of these differing readings of British television broadcasting tell us more widely about the research of broadcasting policy and from what theoretical debates are these models extended? In part what makes the article so useful is its acceptance that there is not one overarching or dominant ideological system by which each of these models is constructed. It instead places the emphasis on how a cultural organisation’s structure not only governs the practices of production within that institution, but implicitly constructs a dynamic of power between producers and audiences. While each model purveys a suspicion of the abuse of power within cultural production, the article does not see such abuse as inevitable in mass media and moving far beyond the monolithic Neo-Marxist construction of the Culture Industry. By offering the democratic communications model in the distribution and the consumption of mass media, “Television Supplement” offers audiences an empowered, active role in the production process, breaking down the binary hierarchy that must be assumed for the paternalistic or authoritarian models of communication previously constructed to be accepted.

If this study aims in part to investigate the extent to which the producers of television content and its audiences might be positioned as autonomous within the language of the remit’s purpose and expectations of Channel 4, then this article usefully shows how language can construct these positions in differing ways within one broader industrial landscape. So this study seeks to deconstruct the assumed ‘nature’ of British television comedy work, by pointing to what kinds of work and what kinds of working processes are determined as ‘creative’ within the culture of the industry and furthermore how that manifests at different levels of Channel 4 as a cultural organisation.

By analysing this language, both written and spoken, this study will also seek to understand where and how television comedy is constructed as a genre specifically. As Nitzan Ben-Shaul notes on his attention to post-structuralism with respect to American sitcom *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1989-1998):

“Jacques Derrida claim(ed) that the very term genre implies a non-justifiable boundary and origin or centre, which immediately spreads and leads to a search for wider boundaries and further origins in an endless chain. Therefore, Derrida rejected the term genre” (Ben-Shaul, 2000: 75).

Ben-Shaul describes an emerging criticism of the term “genre” with respect to the problematic structuralist notion of “textual boundaries and the derived notion of a deep central, determining, static or essential feature underlying a given text” (75). So while I use the term ‘television comedy’, this study seeks to interrogate where certain types of comedy are included within this category, whereas others fall under different generic headings such as entertainment, comedy drama or US import. As a study of genre, this is a study of how, within these sites, comedy is notionally *created* through discourse in legislation, in what departmental and organisational choices Channel 4 make in its definition of what ‘television comedy’ is and how comedy workers describe the genre as specifically different to other types of programme. The deconstructive perspective asks, then, what motivates those distinctions, how are they conflicted and what can they tell us about how ‘television comedy’ is constructed within the industry itself?

The next section shows how the implementation of government plans to mend perceived failings in broadcasting was guided by shifts in how the role of television was being perceived and in how British cultural studies was providing new perspectives on popular culture. The language used to describe the moral, societal and educational purpose of television in such theory renders denotations of “value” as shifting from context to context and thus, in the legislation examined, such denotations of value are the product of other cultural perceptions.

What has been demonstrated here in the analysis of Television Supplement, however, is how this cultural studies approach can be applied directly to the construction of organisational ideologies. For Channel 4, as the next section of this chapter will address, the definitions of mass media as a potentially democratic and representative communications system provides a framework in which audiences and producers are empowered, while the regulator, or Channel 4 itself, is given less editorial control. These operational regulations to which Channel 4 was to be held accountable, constructs the broadcaster’s creative identity within a unique structure of power in British broadcasting, both in terms of how audiences are positioned and how the content itself would be paid for. **What this ultimately points to, is a way by which Channel 4’s creative activity can be judged as successful or unsuccessful and position historical assumptions around the social purpose of British public service broadcasting in general, and how those assumptions had changed by the launch of Channel 4.**

What this literature points to, is the potential conflict between traditions of British public service broadcasting, outlined by John Reith's construction of the BBC, and the redistribution of power as related through the language of Channel 4's identity. What the next section will explore is how the language used in reports and government legislation shows a change in the understanding of particular notions used to construct creativity, such as "quality", "risk", "minority" and "diversity" in programming, as a reflection of these shifting ideological attitudes.

## Methodologies

### Discourse Analysis and Institutions as Case Study

The research of this thesis, using Channel 4 as a case study, is conducted through the detailed thematic analysis of three sites of construction: firstly, historical policy documents on British broadcasting, secondly Channel 4's institutional statements about its purpose and interviews with commissioners and lastly interviews with creative practitioners at production level. The purpose of such analyses is to further examine the implicit discourses around cultural value and creative agency that underpin distinctions made between public service and commercial broadcasters, genres and departmental categorisation and consequently the agency of types of creative labour in the production of Channel 4 television. The parameters of this case study, then, highlights the "Two Faces" of Channel 4 (Blanchard, 2013: 365) as an institution that has both a specific public service remit and a commercial funding structure and investigates how this impacts on the construction of comedy programming, its production and creative personnel.

Before looking at the literature within which this method is positioned, some more practical methodological choices that this project relies upon must be outlined, particularly for a study concerned with distinctions and definitions within a creative institution. Firstly, by what do I refer to as Channel 4? While the primary outcome of this thesis is to examine how the very notion of Channel 4 Comedy is constructed, I must first attend to how this problematises my sites for analysis and in doing so argue both for the basis of this analysis and for the analysis of how both institutions and genres are created through discourse.

When the "fourth channel" as an institution was recommended by the Annan Report the Future of Broadcasting, its role was envisaged as providing an additional singular channel that would serve a certain role in the landscape of British broadcasting, in relation to BBCs One and Two and ITV (Annan, 1977: 471). However, three decades later, as cable channels have emerged and terrestrial networks now provide portfolio programming, the Channel Four Television Corporation is responsible not just for Channel 4, the flagship station first aired in 1982, but also E4, More4, 4Music, Film4, FourSeven, respective "plus one" and HD

channels. Does Channel 4 television also include the online streaming site 4od that offers extras, interviews and exclusive online content alongside content that can be found through conventional television technology? And does a study of Channel 4 Comedy attend to content produced under the Film4 production arm of the corporation, which has been part of the corporation since its inception?

To use the schedule of Channel 4's launch on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1982 as an example of the complex process of defining audio visual media, Film4 production *Walter* debuted on that evening and stayed in the realm of television until 2011 when it was released on DVD. Does this, then, make *Walter* a television production? *Four Lions* (2010) was written by television comedy writers Chris Morris (*The Day Today*, BBC2, 1994; *Nathan Barley*, Channel 4, 2005; *The IT Crowd*, Channel 4, 2006-2013), Jesse Armstrong (*Smack the Pony*, 1999 – 2003; *Peep Show*, 2003 -; *The Thick of It*, BBC Four 2005 – 2007, BBC Two 2007 - 2012) and Sam Bain (*Smack the Pony*; *Peep Show*; *Bad Sugar*, Channel 4, 2012). Morris also directed *Four Lions*, but it was debuted at cinemas – is this then a product of television talent or filmmaking? What of *The Inbetweeners* (E4, 2008-2011), a teen sitcom written and developed for E4, which was then made into a film by Film4. *The Inbetweeners Movie* (2011), using the same writers, performers and director from the television series, enjoyed record breaking box office success on its cinema debut (*The Inbetweeners Movie breaks UK box office record*, 2011). So are these titles Channel 4 comedies?

Channel 4 has not been unique in British broadcasting in blurring the boundaries of film and television production. In 2009 the BBC produced *In the Loop*, a film adaptation of Armando Iannucci's satirical comedy series *The Thick of It* (BBC4, BBC Two) and in 2013 released *Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa* a film based on Steve Coogan's eponymous long running television character. Elsewhere, Granada Productions, part of the ITV Studios group, who have content commissioned by the BBC, ITV and Channel Four, produced *The Queen* starring Helen Mirren as Elizabeth II. *The Queen* debuted on ITV1 on September 2nd 2006, but was given a cinema release in the UK on September 15th. Again, the boundaries are blurred: is this film or television production? Woody Allen has made films with both Granada Productions and BBC Films, *Anything Goes* (2003) and *Match Point* (2005) respectively; in what sense are these British and/or broadcasting productions?

Beyond film, there are potentially even more sites for consideration – accompanying books, DVD releases and extras, web material or the Twitter feeds of Channel 4 talent might potentially be a sites for constructing 'Channel 4 Comedy'. While I do explore the very

definition of television comedy in this analysis, clearly parameters must be set as to where I look, to whom I speak and what questions I ask when gathering primary materials.

The interests of this study at the institutional level of analysis operate around the distribution of cultural value through the organisation of generic departments, and to what counts as a Comedy commission at Channel 4. So while I will question cultural value distinctions based on which department has commissioned a programme for broadcast by the Channel Four Television Corporation, it is of less pertinence, at least for the contribution that this study makes to research around distinctions of cultural value, as to through which outlet such content might be being consumed. What's more, it is Channel 4's own blurring of such categories through its public statements about what counts as a comedy and what doesn't that provides the basis upon which this thesis answers the question of what it means to make comedy and how this relates to discourses around creativity and cultural value.

The lines of the Comedy, Entertainment and Acquisitions Departments are categories that are variously blurred by Channel 4: programmes from each of these internal departments contribute to the comedy category on Channel 4 streaming site 4od. However, while the talent involved in Film4 productions might also be found working on broadcast television, Channel 4 itself never refers to Film4 productions themselves as 'comedies'. So rather than analysing the text or looking to the labour force to make these distinctions I instead look to how Channel 4 defines the television genre.

Section Two examines which 'comedy' programmes are commissioned by the Comedy Department, which I refer to as Comedy with capital 'C', and which are commissioned by Entertainment or bought in by Acquisitions, comedy with a small 'c'. I determine which programmes to address in this section by which are categorised as "comedy" on the 4od streaming web site. As there are no Film4 productions listed here, the broadcaster themselves are making a distinction as to the kind of content that is included in this online space. Consequently I have excluded productions under Film4 as a direct site for analysis, despite the various blurring of distinctions between film and television at the Channel Four Corporation and elsewhere in British broadcasting.

Ultimately, for the reader's clarification, 'Channel 4' refers to the television broadcaster and to the Channel Four Corporation as a whole, 'Channel 4 Comedy' refers to either the content commissioned by the Comedy Department at Channel 4 or the Comedy Department itself, and 'Channel 4 comedy' refers to that which is listed under the 'comedy' category on the 4od

web site but may be commissioned, developed or acquired outside of the Comedy Department.

### **Multi-platform Analysis and Three Site of Inquiry**

Discourse analysis is a complex and at times elusive methodological perspective through which to understand the meaning of and within the use of language. We might give this approach the loose definition of analysing what implicit messages or social processes must underpin the explicit language of a certain written text or utterances of speech.

As shown so far there are a number of reasons why I have chosen Channel 4 as an organisation to investigate discourses around comedy and creativity. But in terms of the specific site of discourse I am combining two methodological approaches outlined in the literature in order to address the historical construction of Channel 4 as well as the spoken text gathered through interviews. For Alvesson and Karremank, organisational discourse analyses fall into two categories: “the study of the social text (talk and written text in its social action context) and the study of social reality as discursively constructed and maintained (the shaping of social reality through language)” (2000: 1126). While the former, they argue, examines the local ‘talked’ and ‘textual’ nature of everyday interaction and the latter looks at the broader context in which the construction occurs, I seek to use the broader context of the industrial environment in which Channel 4 was conceived to analyse how the language not only has changed over time, but manifests in the talk of those who work under that organisational construct. In doing so I move beyond the empirical evidence I find within the policy and interviews, what Alvesson and Karremann talk about as a common problem for discourse analysts, addressing “discourses with a capital D – the stuff beyond the text functioning as a powerful ordering force” (1127). So while I argue that comedy forms are organised by distinctions in Channel 4’s departmental structure and the language that refers to departments constructs what it means to make those distinct comedy forms, I also argue that this applies more broadly to the process of making cultural value judgements and the impact this has on the creative work force and, in particular, diversity and equality.

In keeping with aims of poststructuralist research, these methods intend “not to establish a final ‘truth’ but to question the intelligibility of truth/s we have come to take for granted

(Graham, 2011: 666). But while this aim is common to the occupation of discourse analyses, the range of disciplines that have emerged define elements of such an endeavour differently, so it is here that I identify my multi-textual sets of materials for analysis and the critical methodological approach this thesis takes.

As this is a study concerned with the (re)production of cultural value and the distribution of creative worth through discursive processes (the criteria for which will be explored in the literature around cultural theory and the creative industries), this is a study that is interested in the distribution of power through cultural and social hierarchies. As such, this analysis attends to the substantial underpinning of Michel Foucault's perspective on discourse analysis, which will look not just to what is being said in the policy documents and interviews I analyse, but what it is that what is being said, does. I refer to Jason Mittel's application of Foucault's notion of *discursive formations* to genre theory and take a poststructuralist position, to derive the meaning of a genre through a cultural theory approach rather than textual analysis (2004: 12-13). However, I also address Fairclough's adaptation of Foucault to the study of discourse within institutions, to understand the rules of formation that contribute to the understanding of perceivable discursive regularities (Foucault, 1972: 38) and the consequence for social hierarchies and social change (Fairclough 1992: 37).

While this perspective is applicable to the distribution of power with relation to access to work within creative institutions such as Channel 4, this thesis tends to be less accusatory of intentional discursive construction. So while I argue that there are issues that hinder diversity in television Comedy and that there are arbitrary constructions of value placed on certain roles that lead to the unnecessary detriment of some cultural work, my analysis is not one that seeks to accuse those working in television of using such discourses to limit access to the industry. Indeed, quite the opposite: while I do believe that those at commissioning level, for example, aim to broadcast a range of diverse talent as the Channel 4 remit demands, I argue that discourses that underpin talk around making television Comedy (that which is categorised under the work of the Comedy Department), maintain barriers to cultural work regardless of other intentions. It is in this sense that my analysis of discourse is critical.

Briefly here, I define cultural value and the agency of certain roles within a creative labour market as representative of and in possession of power in terms of identity, and in doing so state that how this value is distributed as a political act which hold benefits and detriments to be felt accordingly within the television comedy industry as a result. That is, while I cannot determine cultural value here in the political economic sense that Pierre Bourdieu's

*Distinction* (1984) would suggest, or in the Neo-Marxist position (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944) as I am already considering value within mass culture, I do examine the definition of cultural value and maintenance of distinction within mass culture forms, which are (re)produced through talk and as such, discourse.

For section one, this cultural value is distributed in hierarchies of television genre in the public service context of British broadcasting; in the second, through the institutional generic categorisation of comedy programming within Channel 4; in the third, how these first two distinctions manifest in the cultural value placed upon different types of creative work. This three tiered analysis is also intended to argue that cultural value, as it operates within industries and institutions, does ultimately construct not only the cultural product but the producer and the consumer. It is argued that “multiple perspectives and methods increase the likelihood of reaching good explanations” (Fairclough, 1992: 31). It is with this in mind that this study intersects these macro, meso and micro systems of the discursive production of comedy, value and creative work.

What a discourse analysis approach to this multi-platform subject allows, is a method that combines these different sites under one reflexive and interrelated method and “provide[s] the tools to understand the social processes that produce organisations” (Hacking, 1986: 82). The poststructuralist perspective underpins the idea that while Channel 4’s public service remit explicitly states the intended action of its subject, the broadcaster itself, contexts in which this remit is mobilised allow for this discursive construction of such an organisation to be produced (32).

As such this study is one that blurs the lines between the Foucauldian analytical perspective that examines the distribution of power within discourse, and a discourse analysis approach “more interested in understanding the way in which discourses ensure that certain phenomena are created, reified and taken for granted and come to constitute that reality” (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 224).

Fairclough’s primary objection to existing Foucauldian approaches in discourse analysis is that there is not enough acknowledgement of the extent to which the analysis itself can and does both reconstruct and defy the effects of discourses that it examines. It is in this sense that he states that discourse analysis and discourse itself can be a tool for social change (Fairclough, 1992: 37). I take this into account particularly in the range of interviews I have collected with creative practitioners: while I question why it is that I have been able to gain greater access to white males in the industry rather than women or people of colour I also

acknowledge that the analysis of interviews exclusively with white males reconstructs the notion that these are the voices of the creative talent in British television Comedy. With this consideration, my aim, then, is not only to be reflexive about why, within the text, “it is that certain statements emerge to the exclusion of all others and what function they serve” (Graham, 2011: 66) but to make sense of why “a particular text and why certain of its criteria are attended to and not others” with reference to the availability of participants (Fairclough, 1992: 30).

Fairclough also objects to what he argues is Foucault’s lack of attention to specific texts (57). While Fairclough takes the interest in power dynamics maintained through discourse and the relational aspect of discursive operation as intertextual (55), and he does not wish to render the Foucauldian perspective purely analytical of linguistics or purely of a single given text, Fairclough describes a three dimensional framework to the method of discourse analysis, one that maps “three separate forms of analysis onto one another” (Fairclough, 1995: 2). Those forms are the “analysis of (spoken or written) language texts, of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption) and of discursive events as instances of socio-cultural practice” (2). Fairclough here is describing the three conditions of a single site for analysis that contribute to the text, context and discourse that encompass “the power of incomplete, ambiguous and contradictory discourses to produce a social reality that we experience as real” (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 1-2).

For this study, I foreground several elements discussed here by Fairclough, with reference to a Foucauldian perspective and the application, as such, to a method of analysis. Firstly, that discourses occur in separate but connected and interactive textual sites and affect and are affected over time by shifting social processes. This element is what I attach the use of policy documents, public materials and research interviews as collectively evident and producing of the discourse of Channel 4 Comedy.

The first section will look at policy documents on broadcasting and particularly at the Annan Report on the Future of Broadcasting (HMSO, 1977), by means of addressing where and how statements about both Channel 4 as an institution and comedy as a television genre are constructed. Phillips and Hardy note that “[t]he idea that organisations are socially constructed and exist primarily in language (broadly defined) is becoming widely accepted” (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 12). And it is through the poststructuralist notion that Derrida forwards around the creation of genre through the discursive process that I will look at here in terms of the specific description of Comedy (Derrida, 1980).

The second section will look with greater detail at how types of comedy programming are created but within the institutional distinctions of what gets commissioned by the Comedy Department and what gets made elsewhere by the Channel 4 Corporation. By using existing research around distinction in sociology and the politics of cultural value within critical theory, as well as subsequent responses to it, this second section will look at how value is attributed to these different types of programmes and what that means in the context of Channel 4's public service responsibilities and its advertisement based - and therefore ratings - based funding structure.

Finally, the third section uses talk with creative practitioners in British television Comedy, who have written, edited and/or performed within the production of Comedy content commissioned by Channel 4, to see where distinctions of value are made around creative labour. This thesis examines the dynamics implicit within these two sites of language, policy and face to face interviews, in order to demonstrate the distinctions of cultural value being made between genre, within genre and within the creative process of television comedy production. As such this thesis demonstrates how these discourses operate in seemingly independent sites from one another, and at times accordingly conflict, but also intersect and inter-depend on each other in order to produce meaning around Channel 4 Comedy.

In order to analyse these discourses, the literature review of this thesis looks to constructed histories of research into creativity, historical discourses of creativity and the contemporary context of the study of the creative industries, as well as the politics of cultural value mentioned above.

### **Interview Ethics, Reflexivity and Provenance**

In order to produce evidence of provenance I consider here how the different roles of the participants I interview might affect their responses to the interview scenario and the structure of each interview's narrative. As research interviews are classed as an "interventional" method of gathering data, and as such are not perceived to be entirely objective or neutral (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000: 35), there are several implications for how my conduct as a researcher affects the outcome of the data collected before the process of analysis even takes place.

The acquisition of informed consent is at the basis of the ethics of conducting research interviews. As such, I provided prospective participants with information about my specific research on creative practices at Channel 4, the government policy I had examined and that I was studying the notion of creativity and creative value through interviews around creative practice. I asked for an hour of their time and in interviews offered to stop after that time and any further time given was of the interviewee's consent to continue. Although it was always assumed as such by the participants, it was made clear the interviews would not be anonymous.

On acquiring an interview, I prepared a question schedule, rather than a strict questionnaire, that contained broad questions such as "Why do you make comedy?" and "What hinders/assists your role in creating comedy?" to more specific questions referring to their job title or based on my knowledge or research about their careers prior to the interview e.g. for David Mitchell, I asked about his relationship with performing given that he is also a comedy writer.

Though the arrangement of an interview is potentially a form of consent given prior to the interview itself, when I began recording I listed where exactly the content of the interviews would be used (in my thesis which would be available through Open Access, and in published in journal articles in a similar research area or if my thesis were to be adapted and published as a book), asked if the participant could state their full name and job title and confirm they were happy with the conditions stated and continued to give their consent. I also stated that, as an interviewee, they were free to make any piece of information or any part of the recorded interview off the record and that what was said would go back on the record at their request. I also asked if they had any other questions concerning the research or where they might be quoted to give the fullest opportunity for informed, free and voluntary consent, as stated in the University of East Anglia Research Ethics Policy.

However, beyond these standards set by the informed consent of the interviewees, I also considered the extent to which my analysis of their speech, as text, is interpretive. As analysis of apparent discourses therein is informed with cultural theory, there is a sense that the interpretation of distinctions in cultural value, with which this study is concerned, might implicate meanings not only left unsaid by participants, but that actually refer to meanings and messages that they themselves don't consciously, or indeed on any level, personally hold true.

Another consideration was the extent to which participants might be experienced in being interviewed, might consider the specificity of a research interview and might view me, as the interviewer, as in a specific position as an academic rather than, for instance, a journalist. In *After the Interview*, Mills reflects on his experiences with interviewing practitioners in the British television comedy industry, outlining the extent to which participants were alarmed by the formality of academic ethics procedures and were surprised that an academic might want to use interviews with them as the basis of formal research (2008: 148). While I found this not to be the case, this might be a reflection of the high profile or highly reflexive position of some of those to whom I gained access.

As the interviewer I was aware, of course, that I had “more control than the respondent in terms of dialogue direction and topical emphasis” (Tracy, 2013: 132). But using the question schedule model in face to face interviews intends to allow the dialogue to go in the direction in which the participant feels lead by their own thought processes. This was an intuitive preference partly in terms of the research ethics of loading qualitative questioning in any direction, but in particular because the aim of using interviews at all was to allow those who work in the comedy industry to voice their own opinions about the work explicitly, and allow for any connections between themes, subjects or anecdotes to be part of the data from which I drew. While, there were instances with every participant where they stated that their statements wouldn’t be useful, were tangential or were topic for the research aims that they broadly understood I had, as Mills states of his interviews, these are indeed the spaces of talk where they became most expressive and where I lead them the least. Ethically and in terms of provenance of meaning through independent thought processes these were the moments that gave me the most material. This could not have been achieved through any other kind of process of data gathering.

The usefulness of interviews as a text for qualitative analysis is also dependent on gaining a justifiable and adequate sample size. There are few guidelines as to a method of defining what is a useful sample size for the obvious reason that each research project is different: the application of analysis can vary hugely and consequently the depth of the analysis is affected (Marshall et al, 2013: 11). However, this is true of qualitative studies more generally. As the point is to perform detailed analyses upon these texts the number of interviews necessary to reach *data saturation* (Francis et al, 2010: 1230), a term used in interview methodologies to determine effective exposure to evidence, it was more important to this research to gain access to those in particular positions of authority to answer questions, rather than to reach an expansive number of participants. As the commissioning teams at

Channel 4 number only six people at the Comedy Department and six working for the Entertainment Department, a vast quantitative survey would be impossible.

In terms of the method of the following analysis then, I gather common themes to show, even among this small number of participants, that there is a sense in which their statements represent broader discourses around creativity and television comedy. Due to the size of the group of people available to interview within the small commissioning teams at Channel 4 and a small group of producers, the number of interviewees is appropriate and, to an extent, predisposed.

Despite this small group, there are explicit connections between their statements as well as implicit discourses. Given the size of the television comedy labour force as a whole, producing across broadcasters and production companies, there are participants who have worked together and potentially discussed experiences in a way that informs their responses. In the third section of this thesis, Andrew Ellard and Paul Doolan both use plumbing work as a metaphor for some of the writing work they do. While Doolan mentions having seen Ellard recently to the interview, it is possible that they came up with this metaphor entirely independently of one another – but perhaps it came out of conversation they had together. Regardless, what is important is that they both found it a useful enough metaphor, with their own articulation of what it applied to in their work, for it to be offered up in their interview, and it's this fact that, as an analyst, I can use in my work. Indeed, the repetition of an analogy is an explicit demonstration of the ways in which language, through conversive processes, can become common to an identifiable group – such as a workforce – creating a shared understanding of a particular phenomenon – such as a type of work – that further demonstrates the discursive construction of both meaning and reality.

## Section One: The Industry

### **British Broadcasting Policy and the Establishment of Channel 4**

This section's aim is to investigate the initial construction of Channel 4's creative purpose and identity within government reports and broadcasting policy. In order to understand how Channel 4 is constructed as an institution in a post digital television era, and the role of television comedy therein, an understanding of how this initial imagining of Channel 4 as a single channel broadcaster will be central to highlighting how this identity might have changed over the channel's thirty years on the air and out of such changes what shifts in discourse might have arisen. As this chapter takes specific remits and reports as the text, or rather the language used to construct meaning within these documents, this analysis seeks to deconstruct some of the politics of autonomy and responsibility within British television broadcasting. That is, how power is located within the production and distribution of media texts and the extent to which a pluralistic view of British audiences is taken. Furthermore, the ways in which discourses have been addressed by both cultural theory and in public discussion will establish by which of these discourses Channel 4's creative purpose was understood. The three key themes that this chapter will show are central to the purpose and design of Channel 4 are centred around popular culture and mass media effects, the relationship between producers and audiences of cultural content and the role of broadcasting in British society.

I will introduce the most essential government commissioned investigation into the construction of a fourth channel, what would become Channel 4, The Annan Committee's Report on the Future of Broadcasting (Annan, 1977), highlighting the perceived failings of the British broadcasting service offer by BBC One, BBC Two and ITV and the ways in which a publisher broadcaster model, with an emphasis on independent production and a dedication to diversity in programme content would remedy these failings. I then draw on the Pilkington Report, which was also commissioned to address the competition between the single BBC channel, now BBC One, and ITV by designing a third service, BBC Two. I do this in order to look at the different understanding of the term 'diversity' and how, while it has been used as a term denoting quality at these two different points in reports on broadcasting, where it

is used to describe two quite different characterisations. I then look back to the original conception of the BBC as a way of rooting these debates in the history of public service broadcasting in Britain.

First, however, by examining the Broadcasting Act of 1980, revised in 1981, as the license under which the Annan Report's vision for the fourth channel became legislation, I show what exactly is meant by the term 'diversity' for Channel 4 at its launch and how this would encourage diversity, and therefore greater quality, across broadcasters.

### **The Broadcasting Act of 1980 and 1981 and Channel 4's First Programme Policy**

Once the Annan Report had made its recommendations as to how the fourth channel should operate and under what economic condition it could be launched, the Broadcasting Act of 1980, revised in 1981, defined Channel 4's regulatory requirements. It provides the clearest description of how the debates in the Annan Report would come to form the creative identity of Channel 4 at the time of its inception. This piece of legislation also addressed the Independent Broadcasting Authority's role (the IBA) and how it would manage the fourth channel in relation to its existing management of the ITV service and how this would characterise a new direction in the way British broadcasters would be regulated.

In terms of the diversification of content and minority audiences, the "the Fourth Channel" was told to "ensure that the programmes contain a suitable proportion of matter calculated to appeal to tastes and interests not generally catered for by ITV" (HMSO, 1981: 11, para. 1(a)). The document also states that Channel 4 should aim to "encourage innovation and experiment in the form and content of programmes" and "generally...give the Fourth Channel a distinctive character of its own" (1b-c).

The legislation required that the IBA produce an annual report evaluating the channel, a stipulation still required today, although this has been carried out by the current independent regulator, Ofcom, since 2003. The primary subjects for the review focused on those specific elements of Channel 4 that encouraged and required the channel's "distinctive character" (Ibid). Firstly, the annual report should show, through an account of the content of each of the two IBA channels, how the Fourth Channel's programming differed to that of

ITV's and states that "news programmes" are a central point of concern (HMSO, 1. para 43(a)). The report should show how the authority had managed "the encouragement of innovation and experiment" of the Fourth Channel's form and content (*Ibid*).

The first Programme Policy Statement provided to the Board of Channel 4 by the IBA highlights the mission to create an environment in which creative risk taking would be encouraged. Again, to fulfil the remit of addressing new audiences, the statement foregrounds "as a particular charge the service of special interests and concerns for which television has until now lacked adequate time" (Lambert, 1982: 170). The PPS states that "the Fourth Channel is expected, by providing a favoured place for the untried, to foster the new and experimental in television" (170). This remit for broader but more special interest audiences, also acknowledges that the "search for innovation" is not itself new in broadcasting. However, the additional broadcasting hours and "the lesser importance of ratings" that characterise Channel 4's institutional model provides increased opportunities for such innovation (170).

In terms of what constitutes "special interest" or "minority groups within the community", the statement describes "ethnic, cultural, or occupational distinctions" as well as "regional diversities". These are directly correlated to the encouragement of independent production companies and an aim to create "balance between different sources of supply" and seek "the making of such programmes from within the group rather than from outside (171)". The representation of a pluralistic society is valued not just in the content of the programme and to who that content might be addressed, but in the companies and the production work involved in creating such varied perspectives.

The IBA's role as regulator, whilst without distinction from its role as regulator of ITV, acknowledges the "possibility of presenting a wider range of opinions and assumptions" (170-171). Implicitly, the fourth channel is expected to broaden boundaries in terms of subject matter and its treatment, and the IBA should allow for this in its regulation of suitable content within the fourth channel's programme schedule.

So The Programme Policy Statement gives a succinct overview of the three ways in which Channel 4 as a broadcasting organisation was designed to be "different": as a channel for alternative voices, as a site for creativity and innovation, and as Britain's first publishing broadcaster. Furthermore, the necessity for these specifics of the remit for Channel 4, particularly in such direct "relation to ITV", reflected the perceived problems with the

broadcasting services in Britain that the Annan report had considered, and how such a new service could challenge and improve the overall system.

Within the parliamentary reports and legislation regarding the purpose of broadcasting in Britain, notions of morality and social responsibility have consistently been invoked. For the Pilkington Report review of the “disquiet and dissatisfaction” in BBC and ITV programming, the complaints around the broadcasting service focused in part on the explicit portrayals of moral and amoral behaviour. “Chief among causes of the disquiet represented to us about television was the belief or conviction that the general picture it painted of the manners and morals of society was both distorted and likely to corrupt” (Pilkington, 1962: 38). The report describes “disquiet” with regards to this perceived lack of morality in the existing British broadcasting services.

Complaints categorised by the Pilkington Committee as “dissatisfaction” are described as a perceived failing in “the possibilities of the medium” (1962: 41). The requirement that this points to, of television reaching its potential as a power for social good, invoke a more implicit moral framework. This framework relies on the notion that television, as a mass medium, has such power to begin with. This power is observed in a number of places: in television as something that is experienced in the home, where feelings of safety are assumed; as a medium that is ‘everyday’ and so potentially normalising in its establishment and reestablishment of meaning within its content; in a medium that renders audiences passive rather than active consumers. Such connotations are central to fears around the power of television, that this might homogenise opinion or normalise otherwise artificial concepts of reality.

Such a view of television is constructed and reconstructed within the moral rhetoric of the responsibility of broadcasting, evident in British legislation of the medium and the next section of this chapter will look at these discourses more closely. This moral rhetoric, as a means of distributing cultural and social value will be the subject of the analysis of broadcasting debates found in government commissioned reports to unpick what discourses of cultural value underpin the description of Channel 4 in this Broadcasting Act and Programme Policy Statement.

## **Broadcasting Values in Policy: Why a Fourth Channel?**

In order to examine Channel Four's institutional engagement with the notion of creativity within the parameters of comedy production, a wider understanding of how Channel Four's identity and creative purpose was debated at a parliamentary and legislative level must be established. Through such a contextualisation this study can better make sense of debates around the extent of the broadcaster's success in fulfilling its remit, and ultimately take into account to which discourses around the role of television, its products and its interaction with mass audiences, this legislation contributes.

The aims of this section, therefore, are firstly to examine the ways in which the role of the Channel Four Corporation, or the Channel Four Company as it was from 1982 until 1993, was explicitly outlined; and secondly ask to what extent the responsibilities with which the broadcaster was charged were seen to be a remedy to problems perceived elsewhere in the British broadcasting service at that time. In order to do this, I will be looking at the legislation and government reports that perceived such problems within the industry, and how they described and set in place what "the Fourth Channel" should be and how it should behave as a broadcaster.

By looking at what was explicitly said in the relevant parliament commissioned documents during this historical moment, I hope to show to which implicit ideological discourses this rhetoric was speaking. With the theoretical perspectives outlined in communications models above in mind, this analysis will look at how language is used to construct different types of television content, and the positions of the audiences and producers of that content. Such shifts previously outlined in British cultural criticism towards a more audience activist condition will underlie such analysis.

In order to look at the ways in which Channel 4's inception called these implicit discourses into account, this section will study key reports and acts of parliament that debated the nature of such a channel in the lead up to its launch, with particular emphasis on the 1977 Annan Report on the Future of Broadcasting, as a culmination of the debates surrounding "the fourth channel". Other key documents that implemented the Annan report's recommendations are the 1980 and 1981 Broadcasting Acts and the Programme Policy

Statement designed by the Independent Broadcasting Authority, which all detailed specific operational and aspirational qualities expected of Channel 4.

This section will also look to the Pilkington Report of 1962, which would recommend the launch of a third channel in 1964, which would become BBC Two. By examining where some of the same crises of creativity in British broadcasting were noted by these two committees, we can see how descriptions of the roles of television, its audiences and taste manifested differently within these sites of discourse.

The discourses that will be most relevant are those that point to the nature of genre, the role of television media and their relationship with mass audiences, popular culture and the implicity of government regulation. So, in relation to the critical theory outlined in the literature review, I wish to assess the extent to which this legislation positions the audience as a passive and homogenised mass, or if there is a more dynamic address of British society. Moreover, by contextualising the creation of Channel 4 historically, by noting similar moments in the construction of broadcasters' identities, this chapter will look to the shifting ways in which these discourses manifest, signalling a unique moment in broadcasting history and Channel 4 as a unique institution within the industry.

This section, then, contributes to the varying perspectives of what are understood to be the "social goods" and "norms" of broadcasting and the discursive and linguistic construction of those understandings (Gee, 1999: 2). It is through this constructivist notion of value, and creative value, that this project's analysis of the macro to micro trail of discourse will begin.

The primary theme with which this chapter will be concerned are the ways in which Channel 4 was designed to address the needs of minority audiences as a way of attending to diversification, by broadcasting material aimed at special interest groups and by commissioning material from smaller and wider reaching independent production companies than were finding work elsewhere in British broadcasting. As was shown in the literature, the term "minority" in the history of cultural criticism had more often described the cultural elite, in opposition to the impoverished masses. By noting how the Annan Report and subsequent documentation on the remit of Channel 4 would indicate very different associations with the word "minority", this chapter highlights a different ideological perspective for Channel 4, as well as the difficulty with attaching fixed ideological frameworks to terminology in the analysis of creative institutions.

This chapter also provides an historical narrative for such discourse analysis, illustrating from what previous uses of languages associated thematic discourses had been constructed. These historical references, such as the Pilkington Report's recommendation for the introduction of a second BBC channel, will seek to show what understandings of mass media, regulation and types of audiences have been normalised in these past instances. This chapter also aims to find what is specific and unique about the design of Channel Four in these documents, so as to understand which failures in the British broadcasting industry its design was specially created to counteract. In this way, there will be an in depth study of the relevant documents that specifically described Channel 4, framing the late 1970s to early 1980s as a specific moment in broadcasting history worthy of qualitative study. An exhaustive historical account of how all British broadcasters have been legislated would not be a pertinent enough narrative regarding Channel 4's inception. For a study into how the construction of meaning in one given historical moment, extended attention paid to any such chronology of the industry would be a methodological side-tracking; this is a study concerned with language rather than events.

This study will also avoid an historical narrative of Channel 4's inception. There have been a number of thorough accounts that focus on the chronology of events that brought about Channel 4's launch and the key people for whom the creation of the broadcaster was a responsibility: *Channel Four: Television with a Difference* (Lambert, 1982), *The Making of Channel 4* (Catterall, 1999) and later Maggie Brown's *A License to be Different: the Story of Channel 4* (2007) and Dorothy Hobson's *Channel 4: the Early Years and the Jeremy Isaacs Legacy* (2008). These accounts explore Channel 4's inception through a variety of sources, but do so in ways that focus on the revealing of truths about Channel 4's position in broadcasting. This study aims to take these narratives into account as contributors to the discourse that has constructed Channel Four's identity and, in acknowledging their conclusions, use discourse analysis to better understand what assumptions are being taken for granted by these histories.

Not all regulatory material on the role of television in society will carry relevance to this investigation, but what will appeal as a site for analysis will be moments of debate that surrounded the imagining of other broadcasting institutions in Britain: the inception of the institution of the BBC, the introduction of the second television service of ITV and, as already noted, the third service of BBC Two. The language used to describe the potential effects of broadcasting on the audience, through the design of an institution, will provide this historical view of where discourses have been constructed and taken for granted in the past, in order

to contribute to discourses that must be assumed in order for Channel 4's legislative and regulative literature to appeal to logic and usefulness and to appear in keeping with the requirements of British broadcasting services.

Through an analysis of some of the historical moments of government debate and legislative action that enforced the intended societal, cultural and educational responsibilities of the BBC and ITV, one key query with which this section is engaged is the extent to which there is a perception that British broadcasting was failing to meet its perceived social responsibilities. By looking at the interaction between government reports and emerging legislation, with regards to the existing broadcasters and the prospective fourth channel, this study will examine how debates around the purpose of Channel 4, and its ultimate design, were perceived to be a remedy to these failings. Furthermore, the attention given to such failings will highlight the establishment of what is perceived to be the role of British television and how certain genres are constructed as inclusive or exclusive of quality, diversity and cultural value. By looking to such references in moments of crisis in British broadcasting in the past, these constructions can be seen as the reestablishment of societal conventions of what television is for.

Looking at Channel Four's first design in the context of the broadcasting sector of the late 1970s and early 1980s, we may also note how Channel 4's creative identity was specific to this moment. By taking into account the expansion of broadcasting technology at this time, the following chapters' study of how Channel Four is positioned in the current broadcasting industry, as an industry rather than a service, has changed or indeed has failed to adapt. In this way this chapter will highlight some of the ways in which the design of Channel 4 made space for the development of broadcasting technologies which had, until this time, been incompatible with notions of the British broadcasting service.

### **The Annan Report and the Design of the Channel Four Corporation**

The question of there being a fourth channel introduced into the British broadcasting services provided by BBC One, BBC Two and ITV existed long before Channel 4's launch on November 2nd 1982. There had been no technological limitation on introducing a fourth service for some time; televisions manufactured since the late 1960s had been equipped to

receive another channel, presented with buttons “pre-emptively labelled ‘ITV2’” (Lambert, 1982: 1). Published in 1962 the Pilkington Report on the Future of British Broadcasting Services recommended that “one new programme be authorised immediately and a second in a few years’ time”: while the Pilkington Report introduced BBC Two as the third channel, in order to encourage greater diversity to the existing BBC and ITV broadcasts, there was a vision already that services should extend further (Pilkington, 1962: 236).

Anticipation around when and how this fourth service would come into existence gathered pace, a period in broadcasting described within the report itself as one of “spasmodic debate” (Annan, 1977: 229) around a “tantalizing topic” (234). This debate and its address in the *Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting* (Annan, 1977), was also described in 1968 as one of vital national importance by Labour minister for technology Tony Benn: “(b)roadcasting is too important to be left to the broadcasters and somehow we must find some new way of using radio and television to allow us to talk to each other” (in Freeman, 2001, quoted in Jenkins, 1980: 144). In Stuart Hall’s review of the report, he states that it “provides us with an opportunity to examine broadcasting at a critical turning-point in the history of its post-war development” (Hall, 1977: 263). It is the sense in which Channel 4 came about as a result of this critical turning point and the significance of the broadcaster as the embodied response to the changes in British television under review, which demands the close analysis that this thesis offers.

When the responsibility of regulating television and radio broadcasting shifted from the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, which was dissolved, to that of the Home Office in 1974, the Annan Committee was set up to assess the shifting parameters of British broadcasting, in a climate “dominated by talk of a more demanding audience, a weakening of political consensus and by the promise of technological innovation” (Freeman, 2001: 196).

The *Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting* was published in 1977, reviewing the services that were being provided by the BBC One and Two and ITV, in order to make recommendations for improvement. As will be detailed below, it considered the criticisms around the effects that competition had had on the quality of content being broadcast, the effectiveness that launching BBC Two had had on diversifying television content, and sought to celebrate the areas in which the industry was thought to have succeeded (Hall, 1977: 263). The report aimed to evaluate the ways in which the changing nature of television would impact on British broadcasting and its claims to public service.

The Annan Report was also tasked with responding to the increasing number of hours that were being broadcast, as the availability of BBC2 widened across Britain and the assigned hours of transmission that broadcasters were restricted to had been increased in 1972 (11). And finally, the report considered the effects that technological advances in video recording (20) and experiments into the broadcast of cable television would have on the industry and what shape the industry should take in preparation for these future expansions (11).

Despite being a second commercial station which, like ITV, would be funded by the sale of advertising slots, the fourth channel was to be one that served an emphatic societal purpose defined by a public service remit, much like the license fee funded BBC. The design of Channel 4's remit would take into account debates around balance, social value, cultural value and issues of representation. The evidence submitted to the Annan Committee that specifically discussed a potential fourth channel provided arguments around what proportion of the channel should be devoted to educational programming, news and current affairs and special interest or minority programmes. Other debates in the report asked by whom and how exactly such a fourth service should be run, financed and regulated. The decisions made upon how the channel should be allocated and regulated are a key site for examining what discourses around the role of television underpinned the inception of Channel 4.

One of the shifts in discourse around what broadcasting should be doing at this turning point, which is made clear in the Annan report, was the conceptualisation of the audience: the public were, as ever, positioned as central to these changes, but for the first time this report, as echoed in Benn's quote above, argued that broadcasting authorities should research and directly respond to public opinion (Annan, 1977: 54) and that there should be greater transparency between the regulators and the public, a very different view to the paternalistic cultural authority of the BBC monopoly (74). The report's mission was to respond to if and how the industry had moved on from what the Pilkington Report observed "disquiet and dissatisfaction" in the British broadcasting service (Pilkington, 1964, Vol II: 27). It was also to review developments in the industry since the launch of BBC Two in 1964, as a remedy to this crisis (10). The problems in British broadcasting that became most pertinent to Channel 4's design, were matters of diversity and quality in content. The ways in which these issues would be addressed by Channel 4, as will be examined below, would be the publishing model of Channel 4 as a way of encouraging the growth of the independent production sector and the representation of varied British identities on screen that had until been marginalised by the BBC and ITV.

The Annan Report made the recommendation that it was time to bring about a fourth channel. It would consider the possibilities of how such a broadcaster would be funded while the economy of the time was suffering, what financial and regulatory connections it would have to the existing channels, what kind of content a fourth service would provide and to whom such content would be beneficial – to what understanding of social responsibility it would speak. These considerations broadly sit within the idea of the tone and content of the channel and as such its claim to cultural value, and the financial concerns of funding the launch of a new broadcasting service. It is here that this particular notion of creativity as a denotation of cultural value is first constructed in what would become Channel 4's public service remit.

### **Institutions and Audiences: Debating the Fourth Channel's Purpose**

In order to summarise the state of British broadcasting, formal written and oral evidence was submitted by hundreds of interested parties on what was thought of the existing service and how it might be improved (1977: 499-507). These parties consisted of individual politicians, community groups, existing broadcasters and educational institutes, as well as other government departments. As such, many of these institutions fit into the key "ideological state apparatuses" that are loaded with maintaining hegemonic notions of morality, social responsibility and societal mediation (Althusser, 1971). While the Annan Report, and the political pressure under which the committee was set up, placed importance on the public as a moderator of both quality and morality, the institutions that are referenced as contributors to what the fourth channel should be still argue for a high cultural authority – they make distinctions between that which can be left to the responsibility of the audience to judge and that which must be judged by an authoritative institution. As the previous section of this thesis shows, such a construction refers to traditions of cultural value seen in previous broadcasting systems.

However, there were also arguments presented by community groups, such as church groups, arts and artists' associations, women's groups and sports clubs. In addition, the public were asked to contribute their own reviews of how they perceived British broadcasting and to make clear any faults they saw in its service. So there was, for the

committee's consideration, evidence supplied by institutions as well as the public more broadly so there is a sense in which the committee performed this greater interest in responding directly to television audiences, rather than merely assuming what is most beneficial.

In support of the Annan committee's enquiry into the existing broadcasting services, the BBC and IBA submitted their evidence for review, assessing their performances in the provision of an effective broadcasting service. The assessment of this evidence celebrated the BBC for its resilience against the introduction of ITV in 1955, its ability to be "brutally competitive" and its prestige on an international landscape of broadcasters (Annan, 1977: 80). However the report is critical of the corporation's shift in concern, from what it calls public service to "professionalism", a consequence of the commercialism of ITV as a competitor. It states that the effect that the shift has had on the organisation is the creation of "an institutional malaise" and lowering standards in programming (81). As such, while there were two BBC channels, the competitive duopoly between the BBC and ITV had, in the eyes of the report, brought down the quality of BBC content and leaving a lower standard in television programming overall. In an attempt to satisfy the masses, the quality of programming had been brought down overall.

For ITV, the report congratulates the network's restructuring of the organisation, a more balanced programme since the Pilkington recommendations and ITV's varied and "livel[y]" news coverage (149). The channel's content is, however, still deemed to be at a "lower level" than the BBC's, "even in comedy, light entertainment and sport, the popular areas in which it might be expected to excel" (Ibid). Within the report's assessment of the existing services, there is, as was observed in the Pilkington Report, significant space for improvement. As will become more pertinent to the discussion of value distinctions based on genre later, we see how comedy is positioned in line with entertainment at this industrial level, that this is a genre that is "popular" and that the commercial broadcaster is aligned with the "popular" rather than the BBC's public service.

The committee's recommendations for the improvement of television services are summarised as "The Four Requisites for Good Broadcasting" and expressly signals these recommendations as a shift in the attitude towards broadcasting (v). The report states that previous assessments of what constituted a quality broadcasting service, designed to satisfy the needs of the 1960s, would fail to meet the demands of British society in the 1980s (Ibid). Flexibility, diversity, editorial independence and accountability are named as the key

components at the centre of an effective British broadcasting service (29-34). And as Channel 4 is a product of this new attitude towards the broadcasting service, it embodies these requirements through its publishing model and requirement to attend to what was perceived to be a broadening and increasingly diverse television audience.

### **The Regulation of Independent Production**

While Channel 4 would come to be launched exclusively as a publisher of independently produced television content, rather than hosting in house production, there were arguments for the fourth channel becoming a second ITV channel, broadcasting production made by the ITV companies.

The Independent Television Companies Association (the ITCA) and the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) had been proposing for some time that the fourth channel be awarded to their supervision as a complimentary addition to the existing ITV channel. A proposal to that effect was submitted to the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications and was published in 1971 simply entitled “ITV2”. By the time the Annan Report was published in 1977 the IBA had already spent £1.5 million on “fourth channel services” in a push to strengthen their candidacy for a new service (Annan, 1977: 229; Brown, 2007: 10). As the ITCA and IBA envisaged, this channel would broadcast programming made by the same production companies that were creating content for ITV, such as Granada, Tyne Tees, South Wales and Anglia Television. They argued that this would enable ITV to broadcast “more serious programmes” in peak time, much as the BBC had argued in its evidence for being awarded the third service (Annan, 1977: 155).

However, the arguments against an ITV2 highlighted what the fourth channel should become and what it should aim to avoid. These objections expressly feared a stagnation of creativity and social value within a perpetuated duopoly of the existing broadcasters; in the interests of “flexibility and diversity”, the Annan committee concluded that the structure of just two broadcasting authorities could not be perpetuated into the 1990s (72). The report reflects the fears of some parties that the equilibrium of two BBC and two ITV channels would stifle the broadcasting industry’s potential, rather than broaden its possibilities as “the BBC and ITV [would] engage in a self-destructive battle for the ratings” (241). The American

broadcasting system is used as an example of where, it argues, commercial broadcasters' competition for ratings and sources of income "narrows the range of programmes" (Ibid). The report states that in such a system, broadcasters seek to "satisfy the lower common denominator" and as such fail to provide the diversity and quality in programming (Ibid).

Anthony Smith's letter to the *Guardian* newspaper on the subject stated that putting the IBA in charge of the new channel would "complete the symmetrical straight jacket of broadcasting in Britain and continue it forever" (Annan, 1977: 231). The importance of a new and *independent* channel was clearly present in the debate around the role of television in British society. That charge was based on the idea that diversity would benefit the broadcasting industry's output and therefore the viewing public. Ultimately, an "ITV2" was rejected on the grounds that it would only cement the competitive duopoly between the BBC and the existing ITV channel, and, within the report itself, the notion that high ratings and popularity are directly associated with diminishing quality is invoked. It is both the commercialisation and the duopoly that is accused of diminishing standards.

Part of the complaint that the report has of the duopoly is that Parliament had set both the BBC and IBA similar objectives in their remits and that, consequently, the broadcasters had aimed to fulfil these objectives by similar means. This, the report states, had led to the problematic narrowing of choice in content for the public.

The Annan Report does not dismiss the idea of a comprehensive broadcasting service, which is foregrounded within the Pilkington Report as a fundamental element in British broadcasting. This universality across broadcasters is described in the Pilkington Report thusly: "the subject matter of broadcasting is, in principle, all embracing and each of the two public corporations is to treat all of it", making an additional clause, "...but with different emphases and from different standpoints" (73). Again, the report actively pursues the diversification of the broadcasting services and it aims to do so through the division of regulatory responsibility. This would be indicative of how Channel 4 ultimately came to be regulated by the same authority as ITV but with a unique remit, for which the IBA would have to make allowances.

The BBC rejected any interest in being allocated the fourth channel (233). However, it did make recommendations as to how a new channel should be managed and to whom it should address, which are pertinent enough to how Channel 4's remit came to be designed to quote at length:

“There was no need for a further channel for mass appeal programmes and therefore the fourth channel should cater for specialist audiences whose needs the networks could never satisfy fully. The fourth channel should be used for programmes ‘which have no appeal to the casual general viewer or listener but whose committed audiences can be expected to know about them and seek them out’: programmes in languages other than English, programmes for doctors, teachers or trades union officials and programmes for deaf and other handicapped people” (233).

In essence, the Annan Report reflects the BBC, that there should be a new and independent broadcasting authority charged with the responsibility of ensuring the fourth channel upholds the public service duties to which it was to be assigned. To that end, the committee proposed that an Open Broadcasting Authority be instituted which would have “far greater freedom than the IBA...the maximum freedom which Parliament is prepared to allow” (236). The report champions the fourth channel as a space for different types of programming from a variety of independent producers, “a publisher of programme material provided by others” (73) providing “a force for diversity and new ideas” (237).

As a publisher of independently produced material, the report recommends that the channel itself not be held as accountable for its content, particularly when programming is produced by the BBC, ITV or “other specific bodies” such as the Open University (236). While it states that there should not be overly offensive material such as excessive violence, the report also states that programming “that would not be acceptable or appropriate on the existing channels might find an outlet on the fourth channel” (235). As such there is an allowance for some offense and explicitly more offense than the BBC’s public service values or the ITV’s need to sell advertising time might accommodate.

Channel 4 was being designed as a host site for a variety of productions and producers that would be responsible for their own output: “[l]ike any other Authority, the OBA would have to see that an overall balance was achieved in its programmes over a period of time, but we should like to see this done in new and less interventionist ways” (234).

In terms of regulation, the fourth service was not to be treated like the existing BBC and ITV channels. It was to have a far less restricted set of rules and its remit would be focused far more on what it must do, to fulfil its responsibility, than what it must not do in order to avoid abusing it. We begin to see here how the Annan Report’s design of Channel 4’s structure was underpinned not by a lack of regulation altogether, but by a repositioning of television producers and the audience. While it would be the channel’s responsibility to ensure that

there should not be an imbalance of views expressed over a period of time, the remit would allow programming that would look at a special interest area in depth, from one perspective. As such, each producer is charged with more autonomy, and the audience are charged with the ability to participate more actively in viewing potentially unbiased perspectives without their own opinions being overwhelmed. It is the role of the broadcaster to manage the commissioning of content in a way that would not show bias overall but, within its schedule over time, debate various political, cultural and social perspectives.

There is a shift, then, from the idea of a comprehensive service that the BBC and ITV were charged with at this time, to a remit that was underpinned by both experiment and freedom. Channel 4's identity was one that would be composite of different audiences and different producers; the roles of both the regulator and the channel itself would be to provide an arm's length system through which such voices could be heard. This is also a shift towards a notion of culture as something that can be created by the masses, by the people, for the people, where taste is produced without regulation because what the masses enjoy is not necessarily harmful.

Though the Annan report's Open Broadcasting Authority would ultimately be appropriated into the Channel Four Television Company itself, and it was the IBA that would regulate Channel 4, the regulatory freedom that the Annan Committee described would influence the ways in which the IBA would be charged with its regulation of Channel 4. The Annan Committee's vision for experimentation within the fourth service and its inspiration for other programmers was pertinent in its imagining of a regulator that "would therefore itself be an experiment in new ways of exercising responsibility for broadcasting...exploring the consequences of the greater freedom which should be possible when many more channels are available by cable" (236). It promoted the notion of distance between the producers of content and regulators and suggests that this is a progressive structure that, would further mobilise independent production. Within the argument for diversity, the report recommends facilitating structures that would benefit channels for cable and satellite television that had more targeted audiences.

### **The Pilkington Report and Understandings of Diversity and Quality**

Within this new regulatory structure and the perceived freedom and pluralism provided by the exclusive broadcast of independent productions, lay the Annan committee's second mission for the fourth channel. As it was outlined that there should be fewer authoritative restrictions on programme content, and the possibility that within any particular programme some bias might occur or special interest be served, this allowed for the notion that not all programme content was intended to please everyone. Programming that appealed to a small audience was to be welcome in opposition to the BBC and ITV's pursuit of the largest audiences possible who were failing to provide programming for minority audiences (Annan, 1977: 72). The aims of the regulatory freedom that the report envisaged and the independence of the second commercial channel from ITV were to avoid a battle for big ratings, a marginalisation of special interest programming and ultimately a reduction in quality (241). Instead, diversity was to be central, and the fourth channel was to cater to "distinct and neglected audiences" (Lambert, 1982: 144).

Many of the concerns expressed in the Annan Report had been similar to those brought up by the Pilkington Report, particularly around diversity as a signifier of quality programming and cultural value. The following analysis seeks to answer the following questions: if the Pilkington's concern with the quality of broadcasting service being remedied by introducing BBC Two, as stimulation for an increase in 'minority' programmes, how was it that in 1977 the Annan Committee was still reporting the same issues with the broadcasting service? Where had the third service gone awry in providing greater diversity and how could the fourth service go about fixing this? And, more pertinently to this study, how was the notion of 'diversity' described differently in these two reports, and how was Channel 4's design meant to address these different definitions in its pursuit of diversification?

While championing some of the achievements of broadcasting in a variety of programme formats (comedy series, sports, variety, current affairs, television drama and news programming) the feedback that the Pilkington Committee received on behalf of viewers expressed an overall "disquiet and dissatisfaction" with television services (Pilkington, 1962, Vol. II: 27) and as such, the Pilkington Report describes how British television audiences of the late 1950s were being failed by the competitive duopoly of the BBC and ITV service. It cites the lack of variety in subject matter and the scheduling of what niche programming

there was in inconvenient time slots as directly problematic to the quality of the overall service.

In terms of audience's "dissatisfaction", the term "triviality" is also used in the Pilkington Report to point to a lack of quality in the BBC and ITV's programming, as this paragraph demonstrates:

"Much of that which is seen on television is regarded as of very little value... [There is] a preoccupation with the superficial, the cheaply sensational. Many mass appeal programmes were rapid and puerile, their content often derivative, repetitious and lacking in real substance" (Pilkington, 1962: 33).

The report describes the existing production system, prior to Channel 4, as one that shows an increasing "lack of willingness to experiment" and says of the programme makers themselves "one has to infer either that those who provided these programmes mistakenly assumed that popular taste was uniformly and irredeemably low, and popular culture irresponsible, or worse, that they did not care" (34). The BBC was said to have "lowered its standards in order to compete with independent television" (41) and ITV were "fall[ing] short of what a good public service broadcasting should be" (67).

The report makes clear that its use of the term "triviality" is not just for the purposes of identifying certain genres or formats of television programming. It states that triviality is not "necessarily related to the subject matter of a programme", that drama, current affairs, religious and sports programmes could be made trivial if insufficient in the "depth of its treatment" and that "there is no such thing as a trivial programme in the abstract" (34). However it does align quiz games and panel shows as those most susceptible to trivial treatments and any programme that focuses too much on personalities or "gimmicks" (Ibid). Again there is a distinction made around what programming is more aligned with the trivial and it is those entertainment genres noted as above, to be both popular, and aligned with commercial broadcasting and ITV.

The report categorises these issues under a general complaint over diversity, that "the range of programming in television is not nearly wide enough" (237), that "there was not sufficient variety in treatment" and that competitive scheduling had led to even "narrower range even than the overall range" (34). For the Pilkington Report, there is a correlation between diversity and quality on one hand, and standardisation caused by the commercialism of ITV with a lack of quality on the other.

Looking back to the literature on how creativity is defined, by originality and experimentation, these criticisms give cause to an evaluation that the BBC and ITV services were in a situation of creative crisis and that this crisis was a “waste of the medium” (Pilkington, 1962: 34). Specifically, while there is potential for a better quality of programming to appeal to a mass audience, there is again a direct correlation between the prioritising of mass appeal and a lack of substance – an implicit trap that the duopoly has fallen into. One of the remedies for this lack of substance was to introduce the third service, BBC Two.

In submissions to the Pilkington Committee, with the aim to achieve increased programming variety and balance across the industry, some parties argued for the third channel to be an educational service (Pilkington, 1962: 236-237). Other arguments for the dedication of a third service to cultural and minority programming were made. But the question of whether an exclusively “cultural” or “minority” channel would address these special interest programmes is rejected (237) and an understanding that the third service should be introduced to aid the broadening of subject matter on television, while remaining balanced in the address of each subject, is established in the report (239).

The Royal Society’s objection to such dedicated cultural and minority interest content links some key words for the Pilkington Report’s overall reflection on popular culture, taste and quality:

“the best procedure would not be to have a possible third television channel consisting solely of specialised programmes with a comparatively small audience appeal, although there is great value in providing specialised scientific programmes for a small and well-educated minority, but...to produce a higher proportion of programmes of scientific, educational and cultural significance” (237).

Although the Royal Society is only one contributor among many, it is the only one directly quoted on this matter and highlights a distinct correlation between minority audiences and “significant” programming. Within the complaints of the Pilkington Committee that commercialisation has damaged the quality of British broadcasting, the link between what appeals to small audiences and what is “quality”, a term used by the National Union of Teachers to describe this “significant” programming, is made clear. Conversely and implicitly, the statement is made that what is popular is not “quality”, “significant” or for the “well-educated” (236).

The Pilkington Report states that a third service that specialised in any particular field of interest would contravene how British broadcasting:

“had always been conceived of as comprehensive in character, that it had never been thought right to regard it as means of communication to be shared out among those with a special interest in particular classes of programmes for example the press, or the churches, or the universities” (Pilkington, 1962: 236).

Despite the report’s interest in attending to diversification as a means to improving quality, it concluded that the dedication of one channel to specialist programming “had no place in the conduct of broadcasting” in Britain (1962: 236).

In compliance with this opinion, the BBC proposed that its second channel would not “be given a minority character”, instead stating that in order to provide an increase in “the number of serious cultural and informational programmes” it would provide “a diversity of programmes on either channel” (238-239).

The key difference between the Pilkington Report and the Annan Report is the way in which they take this notion of “diversity” into account and the method through which it was to be achieved. Broadly speaking, the Pilkington Report recommends this diversification is sought through high quality, documentary and particular leisure programming whereas the Annan report is specific about the representation of diverse audiences.

A broader range in programming for the Pilkington report meant balancing the tone and variety of the BBC’s content overall, which was to “remain the main instrument for broadcasting in the United Kingdom” (1962: 288). Since it judged that Independent Television had failed to live up to the remit set out in the 1954 Television Act, it was refused its bid for a second service (245). However, the Independent Television Authority (the ITV regulator that would later be replaced by the IBA) stated that allocating a new channel to an existing institution would not create diversity at all and that diversity could only be the result of “the existence of as many different organisations as possible” (239). This could argue not only for the introduction of a new independent broadcaster but also the vitalisation of the independent sector and the generation of many new production companies through Channel 4’s demand.

This view, dismissed in the Pilkington Report in 1962 was to be revived by the Annan Committee. The Annan Report recommended the institution be a publisher of independently produced material as a way of meeting the need for industry-wide diversification. The remit

for Channel 4 to focus on such an aim was suggested as a way to encourage a change in broadcasting production practice across the board. In its conclusion of the evidence for the fourth channel plan, it states that this “scheme is integral to the philosophy of our Report” and that if it were to be put into place, “it would lead to better programmes, more diverse programmes, more socially useful programmes and more enjoyable programmes for hundreds of thousands of people” (Annan, 1977: 241). For the Annan Report, these key methods, intended to ground Channel 4’s creative identity in diversity, were the blueprint which all British broadcasters should aspire to incorporate into the satisfaction of their own remits.

### **What is ‘Minority’ Content?**

The notion that minorities were not having their needs met by either BBCs One or Two or ITV is outlined in the Annan Report and prioritised as a concern that should be remedied. Diversity, a lack of range and variety, was also highlighted by the Pilkington Report as an impediment to a quality broadcasting service. However, there are different ways in which the term “minority” had been used at such industrial levels of discourse, as there are different notions of “diversity” and there are arguably multiple potential audiences outlined by the Annan Report to describe content aimed at special interest and smaller audiences. Elsewhere, while not always referred specifically to as for “minority” audiences, certain “special interest” content that was aimed at catering for particular and purposefully small audiences was being hailed as vital to the existing services and pertinent to the design of the fourth channel.

For instance, in the debate as to who would be allocated the fourth channel, the ITCA argued that an ITV2 would have addressed the needs of both “macro” and “micro” minority groups, referring to golfers, arts and crafts enthusiasts and music and literature lovers, describing “minorities” as people with recreational special interests, leisure or high cultural interests (1977).

ITV networks were praised by the Annan Committee for their commitment to programming made by regional communities, for regional audiences, calling it this an “essential aspect of Independent Television” (1977: 150). Evidence was submitted by a number of parties,

including the English National Party, the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Methodist Church, amongst others, suggesting that the fourth service should focus on the broadcast of “regional and community television stations” (Annan, 1977: 233-234).

The educational programming available in the existing service was praised by the committee, but was an area upon which the fourth channel should expand: “The BBC was already providing courses on these lines and the scope for further development was enormous” (1977: 234). The Open University suggested that the fourth channel be devoted to educational programming, others, such as the Headmaster’s Association, the Association of Education Committees and the Association of County Councils, said that a new channel should in part be used for educational purposes (1977: 232). Furthermore, there are recommendations highlighted in the report that such programming should not just be for schools or the “well educated” as the Pilkington Committee suggested in its argument for further education programming. The BBC’s Further Education Advisory Council stated that a wider more inclusive spectrum of education be supported by the introduction of an “Open College”, that would complement the Open University’s programming at a “lower academic level” (1977: 232).

In terms of diversification then, contributors argue for more community, regional and educational programming. These categories are constructed as those which interest minority audiences and such audiences are constructed as those that the broadcasting system has been failing in the past.

The use of the term “minorities” to denote ethnically and culturally diverse audiences is not an explicit element of how the Annan Report would describe the fourth channel’s broad aim to encourage diversity. It was not until a year after Channel 4’s launch that a report on *Ethnic Minority Broadcasting* commissioned to investigate BAME audiences was published by the Commission for Racial Equality. This report showed an appreciation for Channel 4’s address of such minority audiences but still felt that such programming occupied “low priority within the broadcasting organisations” (Anwar, 1983: 70)

Pre-emptive to this specific address, the Annan Report places emphasis on the “Treatment of racial minorities” as a site for concern in the future of broadcasting stating that “[r]acial discrimination and insult is the most explosive social problem of our times resounding with national and international overtones” (259). This heading is within the “Programme Standards” section of the report, which is largely focused on matters of taste and decency, so it is perhaps not surprising that this section at least focuses on offense in representation

rather than levels of representation per se. What is significant for the creative identity of Channel 4, its assigned commitment to diversity and how I determine the cultural value within its construction, is the shift from 'minority' as a term for leisure interests or further education, to regional or community interest groups, to the inclusion of people, audiences and British social identities that have been marginalised and rendered invisible by their invisibility in broadcast content in the past.

For this study of how comedy appears at this industrial level of discourse, it is also significant that the first site in which a debate about the "treatment" of different ethnicities appears is specifically focused on comedy, in terms of specific debates about comedy content itself and the role it has to play in a public service medium that is explicitly loaded with a duty of morality and social care. I argue that the cautionary debate about the effects of comedy and its potential for harm, in this example for the representation of race and ethnic minorities, is one that aligns comedy with the popular and the mass.

The Annan Report calls into question the subject of irony and how different people might respond to specific sitcoms *Love Thy Neighbour* (Thames Television: 1972 – 1976) and '*Til Death Do US Part* (BBC: 1966 – 1968). It discusses the divisive reactions to such programmes, the potential of "breaking down stereotypes and ridiculing the expression of racial prejudice" and the Community Relations Commission's accusation that these programmes "reinforce and legitimise negative attitudes" (1977: 259).

Ultimately, the Annan Report has it that there are grounds for race being the subject of comedy, but under certain considerations. Firstly, that the extent to which a joke might be offensive to a minority group depends upon how well established that group is within Britain, using as an example, "Scots and Yorkshiremen need no special protection: they can give every bit as well as they can take" (259). Secondly, that the use of generalisations about "particular race[s] invariably sharing the same characteristics" were "tasteless and cruel" and a last resort for comedians trying to get "a cheap laugh" (259). All such sentiments posit such comedy as without value, including a financial analogy of cheap-ness, and low quality.

While the Annan Report doesn't state that there should be greater representation of different races and ethnicities within programming specifically, it does state that what representation there is should, overall, be balanced. From this position, the Programme Policy Statement that the IBA brought in as the remit for Channel 4, in response to the Annan Report's recommendations, would specifically describe minority interests as those associated with the needs of viewers from a variety of different ethnic and racial

backgrounds (IBA, 1980: NP). In the context of the Annan Report more broadly, this notion of the public having a variety of needs and issues of representation is what informs the definition of *diversity*, and in turn how this is used to denote *quality*. Its way of addressing this in practice and in terms of the design of Channel 4, is to provide a home for diverse content to offer a wider range of programming spread across the two channels.

As shown in this chapter's analysis of the Pilkington Report, this notion that a new channel should have the responsibility of providing content that served specific minority audiences was at odds with how broadcasting had been conceived by such authorities in the past. Through its explicit criticism of a competitive broadcasting duopoly, the Annan Report reconstructs the idea that quality programming is compromised by a commercial or "professional" preoccupation. Implicitly, it fears the homogenisation of culture that underpins social anxieties around mass media and popular culture, which, for British broadcasting, was not a new motivation in policy making. However, the Annan Report's active interest in engaging the public, avoids the casting of audiences with the same passivity as some studies of these anxieties suggest, and makes the relationship of audiences to popular culture and mass media more complex. Instead it represents the British public not only as democratised and pluralistic in their consumption but also as ultimately knowing what's good for them: it suggests that society can be empowered not by being instructed as to what is good quality or high value culture, but by diversity, experimentation and conversation. In this sense, the construction of what can be called cultural capital within legislation has changed, from previous legislation and the writing that had informed it.

The roles of the producers, the broadcasters and the regulators have also changed. The fear that the quality of the cultural product, the broadcasting content, will be diminished is directly associated with the negative effects of a two party competition. However, in a solution to the existence of this competition (there is no suggestion that British broadcasting should return to a monopolistic system) the extension and diversification of that competition would improve British television, provided it were properly regulated.

Regulation has always been central to how British broadcasting had been constructed as an industry, how television and radio had been positioned as mass media and how British broadcasting has been discussed by the academy. The Annan Committee's repositioning of the public as actively involved in informing broadcasters' representations of taste, decency and culture is a move away from the paternal authoritarian broadcasting ethic propagated by John Reith in the early envisaging of the BBC.

## **Reith, Paternalism and the discourse of British Public Service Broadcasting**

Central to the construction of the BBC as an institution was the authoritative moderation implicit in the Reithian public service broadcasting ethos. The design of the BBC was a culmination of findings from the 1923 Crawford report, the 1925 Sykes report and the influence of John Reith, the first general manager of the BBC when it became a company in 1922 and its director general when it became a corporation in 1927.

This imagining described the role of the BBC as one charged with being a public service that had the power and responsibility to enrich the cultural and intellectual lives of the society to which it broadcast. On the subject of radio broadcasting in 1924, Reith writes of two opposing views of broadcasting, one that describes an act of pure escapism and as a waste of time, another as a tool for building knowledge, experience and character (Reith, 1924: 19). Reith adopted the duty to “inform, educate and entertain” as the key mission for the BBC which remains at the heart of the BBC’s public service commitments today (*BBC Missions and Values*, 2015).

The insistence that British broadcasting embrace the potential to enlighten the masses was at the centre of Reith’s ethos. He argued that failing to take advantage of the educative and informative potential of broadcasting would be “not only dangerous, but stupid” (Reith, 1924: 19). There was an enormous potential of power in broadcasting to which Reith’s remit of public service alluded and with there was an evident concern that this power would be mismanaged, as was described of the commercial system in America at the time (Coarse, 1950: 37). Broadcasting is loaded with a great deal of importance to the public: what broadcasting does and how it operates, therefore, is also of great importance. Implicitly, the notion that broadcasting was a valuable tool also upheld the idea that such power could be dangerous to the viewing public and thus it must be managed at a legislative level and institutionally under the guidance of Reith’s authoritative direction and management.

Reith’s particular perception of public service broadcasting became the very centre of how the role of radio would be understood in British society and would be perpetuated in notions of television’s power on BBC television’s post-war re-introduction in 1946.

However, limitations were called into question as to how this authoritarian position could represent the whole of society and the danger of the power of television being in the hands of so few people and just one institution (5). Despite a commitment to balance and

impartiality and a wish to be available to all British citizens, from the Reithian philosophy of public service broadcasting emerges the implicit notion that it is the BBC who is able to manage what is a balanced view and a correct and morally agreeable mass media service and that they are a reliable site for impartial authoritative information with the country's best interest at heart.

There were objections to the idea that such a single editorial line in British broadcasting would provide a balanced service, present in the parliamentary debates that took place during the initial design of the British Broadcasting Company. One contributor, Mr. E. A. Harvey disputed the idea of a monopolistic service suggesting a broadcasting service more akin to those in America, Canada and Australia, who all had competing broadcast providers. Harvey argued that only with this approach would British broadcasting be “on a road to progress” (Coarse, 1950: 134-135). Mr. L. Hore-Belisha accused the government’s proposals for a BBC monopoly as an act of censorship over “the free expression of opinion and the dissemination of knowledge” (135).

So while reviews such as the 1925 Crawford Report maintained that the BBC should remain the single radio broadcasting service in the UK, there was early unrest with such an approach and views that expressed a responsibility to diversity were offered before any services had gone on the air. In 1934, George E. A. Catlin “rigorously criticised the monopoly” stating that the English people had thrown away the freedom of speech they had worked so hard to establish and that a national monopoly was a “dangerous principle” (137).

While concerns over a BBC monopoly had been recorded by such research since parliamentary debates about broadcasting had begun, it was not until 1951 that an official government report expressed that it was time to take action. A report entitled “Broadcasting: Memorandum on the Report of the Broadcasting Committee, 1949”, more commonly known as The Beveridge Report after the committee’s chair Lord Beveridge, concluded that there was a concern over the “misuse of broadcasting power” and that a single service industry was no longer a viable model (HMSO, 1951: 46).

In its submission to the 1949 Broadcasting Committee, the BBC refers to the conclusions of both the Skye and the Crawford Reports stating that both supported a continuation of its monopoly. However, in its dismissal of a continuation of a monopoly, the report notes that the Skye Committee did not in fact mention any support of maintaining the BBC’s single network broadcasting service (39). However, what *is* pointed out is the suggestion that the BBC should compartmentalise its programming, into categories of “culture” and

“entertainment”, suggesting that the latter be a commercial channel (39). While this early categorisation of British broadcasting types doesn’t go so far as to oppose that which isn’t culture as ‘anarchy’ or suggest that which is entertaining is without social value, the idea that entertainment is *not* culture is clear by such margins. As comedy is aligned in the legislation with entertainment genres, then the construction of comedy and its social value is not one associated with cultural value.

Reithianism was dependent on the idea that there could be a monopoly over broadcasting without compromising the perceived needs of the general public and, in fact, expressly benefiting them. The fear that such a monopoly could lead to an abuse of power positions the authoritative regulator as manipulator, and the audience as passive and without agency.

This changed by the time the BBC and ITV duopoly was criticised for being too orientated around high ratings and popularity first in the Pilkington Report. Such fears spoke to the notion that these two broadcasters were causing the homogenisation, a lack of diversity, in television output which was lowering the quality and endangering the public. This instead positions greater agency upon the audience but implies that ultimately the audience will choose inferior programming and in doing so cause harm to themselves, a scenario Arnold describes as anarchy.

The Annan Report describes a very different position on where and how non-biased broadcasting should be organised. The emphasis here is placed on the “integrity” of the BBC, which the report calls “a concept that is wider than impartiality in the news and current affairs” (Annan, 1977: 80). It also states that the introduction of competition in the establishment of ITV had led to a preoccupation with “economic management” and a “neglect of any concern for the public (or rather ‘publics’ as Reith thought of the audience) except in terms of ratings” (81). The report has it that competition has worn away the role of public service broadcasting in the British industry, leaving the BBC “beleaguered, pressurised”, and with “its sense of direction weakened” (81-82). So this perceived failure to uphold the cultural and moral guidance Reith once heralded, the authoritative management of material at the BBC is criticised with this barrage of language that finds it unsuitable for purpose and in need of major changes.

There is also a lack of creative risk accused of the BBC as the report states that the broadcaster “dreads that single act of misjudgement by some insensitive producer which can damage it” (81). There is a clear concern for the Annan committee, then, that competition had driven creative control to channel executives rather than production workers. The

driving up of power described as the “insisting on referring upwards matters which the professional programme makers themselves believe must be decided by superiors” (*Ibid*), is blamed for a loss of confidence in creativity. As such Channel 4’s less restrictive regulation and greater freedom to present some biased arguments within particular individual programmes serves as a remedy to this in terms of its creative opportunity.

In terms of the argument for what the British broadcasting system should look like, and to what communications model it should aspire, the Annan Report clearly rejects the authoritarian model that had characterised the BBC monopoly, and the commercial influence that the launch of ITV is said to have had on television content. It is suggested by the report that a standardisation of television content is due to a lack of creative risk, a problem not just for audiences, but for production level workers within the industry itself.

As a remedy, a democratic model is offered through the emphasis on independent production, creative freedom and the deregulation of some types of content that would expressly “not be allowed to develop into another competitive channel or one which is predominantly ITV” (482). Channel 4, as a manifestation of this remedy to the existing BBC and ITV duopoly, is described as a broadcaster with a responsibility to multiple voices and perspectives and one that responds directly to audiences rather than presuming a position of cultural authority at the site of production.

### **“Programme Standards”: Taste, Morality and Distinctions of Cultural Value**

Within these debates around the social value of television and its regulation, the rhetoric of morality around the broadcast of certain types of television programmes can be seen to operate a discourse not only of which programmes serve what kind of public service but also where and how programmes are attributed a status of high cultural value and which are not. The categorisation of genre and the language used to construct it, therefore, operates as a method of organisation and the distribution of cultural value rather than referring only to the textual elements within traditions of generic categorisation.

A discourse of morality within rhetoric around the social value and potential dangers of television as a whole is explicitly noted by the Annan Report. It succinctly summarises an

awareness of moral discourse as a tool used to devalue the opinions of large audiences and the content of popular culture:

“Those leaders of public opinion who make public morality their concern usually express the greatest alarm about the influence of what is the most popular, and hence in their view potentially the most subversive medium for art in their times; in the eighteenth century the theatre, in the nineteenth the novel, in the post-World War I years the cinema, and today television” (Annan, 1977: 245).

As shown by Reith’s statement that it is irresponsible and foolish to mistreat or ignore the power for social good that television offers, there is a moral ethos that underpins the regulation of the medium, not only in the content that is transmitted but by broadcasting into people’s homes. Under this ethos, not only must there be a balance in the representation of moral and immoral behaviour, but the implication that broadcasting services have a responsibility and a moral compulsion to be utilised to the fullest of its potential.

This is also implicit in the very act of legislating the broadcasting system; the requirement to legislate speaks to the notion that television and radio might be misused and that the public must be protected from the potential misuse of mass media, by the minority in power who control the means of production. More explicitly, the report asks “Who Should be Responsible for Broadcasting?” (34). The answer is neither the general public, nor the broadcasters, nor the independent producers of content, but regulators. As well as the act of legislating, the specificities of what appears in such legislation provides further impatience as to what is being said about why television requires such regulation.

There are formats and genres of television that the report finds it necessary to legislate, whereas other areas require far less attention in comparison. Part IV of the report is dedicated to the specific address of certain genres, considering, in order, “Programme Standards”, “News and Current Affairs”, “Access and Party Political Programmes”, “Educational Broadcasting”, “The Arts in Broadcasting”, “Films on Television” and “Other Programme Issues” (iii). At least in the titles, there is no mention of comedy, variety show, quiz show, sport or light entertainment, though each of these genres appears elsewhere in the report.

This speaks firstly to the idea they need not be legislated in the same way as those genres titled, because they do not need protecting in the same way – they are commercially viable

and capable of being sustained without the intervention of a regulator or regulated funding. Secondly, the absence of these programmes suggests that, unlike the arts, politics or educational programming, they aren't important or, to use the Pilkington Committee's word, "significant" enough to require such attention to detail – as they are insignificant, they don't deserve the same level of detailed analysis in the policy, they do not matter. The result is that a clear definition of two types of television is set upon by the distinction of what is included explicitly in such legislation and what is conspicuous in its absence. I argue that this is a clear distinction of these programme types being with or without cultural value in the Annan Report.

Firstly, there is television content that requires regulatory attention in order to perform its societal function and to maximise its quality. This type of television responds to a moral responsibility to "enrich" the experiences of its audiences and is inherently of quality (Annan, 1977: 27). Secondly, there is a type of culture that does not require specific attention, either because it doesn't need it or because it doesn't warrant it.

Where these genres do appear within the "Programme Standards" and "Other Programme Issues" sections, the ways in which they are discussed are less celebratory and more cautionary. "Programme Standards", while concerned to some extent with how to "break frontiers" in television, is largely occupied with matters of taste and morality; specifically, the portrayal of sex, violence, wealth and unhappiness in television and what effect these portrayals might have on the public. I have noted above how the representation of ethnic minorities in comedy is a note of concern in this section, which manages to point out comedy's need for sensitivity and protection in its "[t]reatment of racial minorities" while also using dismissive language which trivialises the genre: "[l]et us not be too heavy handed in reacting to comedy which is frequently based on caricature" (259). In the "Other Programme Issues" section, sports programming is celebrated for being a success in the existing broadcasting system (344). However, the discussion focuses largely on sponsorship as an undesirable difficulty that producers must overcome, so as not to include "indirect advertising" (347). There is also evidence that is concerned with a moral issue of encouraging gambling through "announcements about accumulator bets and by the use of tipsters" (347).

The final genre addressed in this section is that of quiz programmes. The report refers to concerns raised in the Pilkington Report about the "disagreeable effects" that seeing a large prize at stake has on television audiences (361). However, the report notes that the "great majority" of the public who wrote in on the subject of quiz shows, did so to express their

enjoyment of them, and no alterations were necessary to the regulations recommended by the Pilkington Committee. The report concludes that it “makes no great claims to the value of these programmes, but... [they] are popular parts of a night’s entertainment” (361). Clearly, the question of “value” cannot be answered by the express popularity of a programme or genre.

So in a report that is constructing how the overall broadcasting service might be improved, what does the exclusion of such programmes mean for how Channel 4 was to be envisaged as part of a solution? How does the Annan Report’s positioning of such genres reflect on how Channel 4 would be regulated in terms of diversity, minority television, quality and moral responsibility?

The language of morality used in these documents points to a wider discourse that uses panic around popular culture and its effects on mass audiences to normalise the idea that creative production is one that should be managed by legislation. As Arnold might argue, legislation represents a necessary cultural authority that must preside because of the impact of the inferior taste of the masses. He charges the taste of the masses as having the power to effect all facets of a society: “[s]ocieties have been ‘destroyed’ by the moral failure of the unsound majority” (Arnold, 1954: 640). For Q. D. Leavis, the need for conserving a cultural authority is in part rooted in the superior intellect of those in existing positions of power. Based in a rhetoric positively inclined towards the paternalistic, she expresses the fear that with the advance of popular culture, the hierarchies that maintain social order will be under threat: “[t]he people with power no longer represent intellectual authority” (1978: 191).

These fears around the effects of both popular texts and popular taste on a society’s moral and intellectual integrity, are still evident in cultural theory around the devaluation of popular cultures: the mistrust of the public to manage their own habits and uses of media consumption, is used to justify state control of the broadcasting medium.

In terms of linking this culture and civilisation tradition to economics, another distinction between programme formats and genres of high public service value and those with entertainment value becomes evident. This rhetoric between that which the masses will favour and that which is good for us, also suggests that popular culture is that which will survive in a free market whereas that which is of high cultural value requires special funding as it will only be of interest to the educated few.

What is outlined here is a common discourse within both broadcasting reports and cultural theory criticism: that that which is considered “cultural” is far more difficult to support financially than that which is described as “entertainment” because that which is “cultural” is by definition not “popular” (Storey, 2013: 7). Or, to position the assumption differently in the sense of the linguistic creation of genre, that which is popular and therefore sustainable in a free market is “entertainment”, whereas that which requires and also implicitly deserves, public funding to support it is “culture”. Beyond what the report has to say about specific genres and how they are implicitly said to be in one of these two categories, there are other equations between what “quality” television might be.

As noted above, the notion of improving the quality of British broadcasting by encouraging diversification within both the industry its content was central to the Annan Report. The report argues that the competitive duopoly to which Anthony Smith so fervently objected would result in both *minority* programming and *quality* programming dwindling after some time (Annan, 1977: 156). There is a concern that goals based on high ratings would reduce the standard of creative output with regards to any such minority programming, as it would create a competitive rather than complimentary service between the BBC and ITV. The recommendation was made that “the fourth channel should not be allowed to develop into another competitive channel or one which is predominantly an ITV 2” (482). Here, this argument infers that competition for popularity has resulted in a homogenisation of the cultural product – what has been favoured by broadcasters because of its popularity, has ultimately been detrimental to quality.

Again this highlights the broader assumption that popularity necessarily points to inferior culture: while entertainment genres are still referenced in the Annan Report, and therefore cannot be said to be absent in industrial level discourses of cultural value, the division still persists between entertainment as popular and public service programming as culturally valuable. This would have specific connotations for how this discourse describes audiences of popular culture, constructing their tastes as without value, in need of monitoring by regulators and, by extension, government. But if high culture is minority culture and popular culture is mass culture then how does this discourse construct the idea of minority audiences and their active participation in the consumption of television?

In the context of how BBC Two should address minority audiences in the Pilkington Report, with more in depth programming in niche areas referring to leisure and educational content,

the foregrounding of minority audiences has a different meaning for Channel 4 than was intended for BBC Two.

The “significant” programming described in the Pilkington Report as lacking in the two channel service was that of “cultural” programming, referring in turn, to the construction of high art: that which is narrow in audience appeal because it can only be understood and enjoyed by an educated few. In this instance, limited audiences are expected to respond to certain forms of cultural content because it is difficult or intellectually challenging. The New Left’s “Television Supplement” criticise this idea of addressing diversity through minority programming of this nature explicitly: “the thing wrong with it is that, by definition and declaration, it excludes ordinary listeners; is engaged in a cultural weeding out process” – minority programming was intended for “top audiences” and this was not the communications model the New Left wanted to see on the introduction of Channel 4 (Coppard, et al. 1961: NP).

Channel 4’s requirement to address minority audiences envisaged such niche groups not as the educated few, but more as a reflection of the pluralism of British society: exclusivity of interest is not built on parameters of class or education but in acknowledgement of the diversity of cultural experiences and identities within British television audiences. This can be seen in the construction of Channel 4’s purpose, particularly in relation to how the existing broadcasting duopoly, since the institution of BBC Two, is said to be failing. The criticism in the Annan Report is that the homogenisation of the cultural product has been detrimental to quality not because a popular product is necessarily without value, but because the economic dependency on one cultural product’s mass appeal, diminishes diversification. For the Annan Report, as with the Pilkington Report and the 1954 Television Act, diversification is equated with quality. But for the first time, diversification looks to quality television services through a democratic model of communication, that engages with audiences directly, rather than one that assumes diversification is merely a term that refers to the resistance of standardisation through the fear of popular culture and its audiences.

What this points to is the ways in which Channel 4’s remit traverses these discourses about what cultural products are for and how notions of quality and popularity interact within a broadcaster of mass media that intentionally aims for minority audiences. It is distributed through a mass medium, but it caters for (comparatively) small audiences. It is niche, minority programming but it isn’t elitist. It isn’t elitist but it also isn’t for everyone all the

time. It is through this understanding that Channel 4 is in keeping with the New Left's understanding of democratic regulated broadcasting.

#### **“A Force for Plurality”: Independent Production and Publishing (Annan, 1977: 235)**

So how do notions of popular culture manifest in the Annan Report's treatment of the fourth channel as a publisher of independent production? Here I look specifically at the construction of Channel 4 as experimental, as requiring freedom from strict regulation and the risk of doing things differently – a construction rooted firmly in the literature noted previously of how best to manage the creative environment and creative work within an institution.

Channel 4's creative identity is one that is based on the notion of difference and solving the problem of standardisation of sameness in British broadcasting. For the Annan Report, this means being different from the existing television services of the BBC and ITV and encouraging diversity across British broadcasting by representing differences of opinion and experience within its own schedule. The regulatory restrictions were also to be different, as would the audiences catered for and the mode of production. While there were independent production companies already supplying content to the BBC and to ITV, Channel 4 was to act exclusively as a commissioning centre for independent television work – there would be no in-house production jobs, upon which the BBC's programme content and ITV's networks had previously been structured. The ways in which the channel was to be structured as a creative organisation were also to be experimental. I have noted that the regulation of the fourth channel and its programme content was to be less “interventionist” (Annan, 1997: 234).

The ways in which the report envisaged the relationship between those who were allocated the transmission of the fourth service and those in charge of regulating it would also be one that spoke to a new structure in British broadcasting. The Annan Report recommended that the IBA be responsible for transmitting the new service, not its separate regulator the OBA: “this will be the first time an Authority responsible for programming is not responsible for transmission” (383). Although the IBA would in fact be allocated as regulator, the fourth channel is described by the Annan Report as a potential pioneer for experiments that will be useful to the future structures of broadcasting. It states that a separation between regulation

and transmission will be “the likely pattern in the future...the fourth channel should reveal its advantages and disadvantages” (383).

First suggested by Anthony Smith in a letter to *The Guardian*, Robin Day proposed to the Annan Committee that “the fourth channel should be administered by an independent authority acting as a publisher” (234). And so, the Open Broadcasting Authority, which would become the Channel Four Television Company, would act “as a publishing agency financed by a combination of advertising, sponsorship and Government grant” (235). This was to be in contrast to the existing three channels, who managed their in-house content to “ensure a proper balance...a wide range of subject matter...and due impartiality in the treatment of controversial matters” (73). There would be no such call for either due impartiality within individual programmes or for the consistent editorial “integrity” to which the BBC was told to aim (80).

Parallel to the home of independent production in the fourth channel, independent production companies were to be mobilised across the industry. It is stated that the fourth channel’s model would provide a challenge to the existing broadcasters and would encourage the BBC and ITV to “creat[e] programmes of a different and intriguing kind” (235). Specifically, the BBC and ITV were asked to “show more willingness to buy programmes and to commission ideas from independent producers” (486).

At this time Channel 4's unique publisher status was a move towards the democratic definition of popular culture: while content would still be subject to the broadcaster's executives and to independent regulation, the authoritative Reithian “editorial responsibility” that had underpinned early legislation on broadcasting in Britain was being, to some extent, dismantled (73). Furthermore, the intention was not only for Channel 4 to provide a diversity in its own operation, but to encourage diversity industry wide, promoting “new forms and new methods of presenting ideas [and] open the door to a new kind of broadcast publishing” (235).

The Annan Report asks in the light of all its recommendations for new structures and methods of broadcasting for the fourth channel, wouldn’t it be “simpler and cheaper and safer” to continue the structures of production and regulation used by the duopoly: “why not settle comfortably into a time-honoured pattern of services, methods of production and programming?” (235). The report suggests that a counter argument to its recommendations would be that to establish a broadcaster based on experimentation, difference and newness would simply be too *risky*.

One of the risk factors is how much time and money it takes to produce the sheer number of hours that the in-house BBC production teams and ITV companies were broadcasting, and that this was not sustainable. The consequence of this economic pressure, as with the competition for advertising revenue, is once again homogenisation or “a standardisation of methods” that diminishes the “excitement and experiment natural when a method of communication is young” (235). This young method of communication refers also to the report’s interest in cable and satellite television. The existing structure would not be able to sustain production through these methods – it would be too expensive upon the increased competition for advertising revenue and consequently smaller operations would be necessary.

For this legislation, these varied perspectives are the key to providing a better broadcasting service in Britain, allowing for greater diversity, the ability to experiment and room to fail. And in its charge that Channel 4 might encourage such practices within the existing broadcasters, the Annan Report values this as a vital remedy to the duopoly’s failings as well. What’s more, the report uses the notion of such a remedy to make recommendations for the British broadcasting industry that would facilitate what it describes as being beneficial to a cable and satellite broadcasting framework. As such, Channel 4 was not only launched to remedy the existing failings of the BBC and ITV duopoly, but to prepare the broadcasting system, through its model of independent production, diversity and difference, for the greater increase in broadcast hours that would become available through the greater private investment into cable and satellite television channels. This rhetoric then, argues for the deregulation of public service broadcasting as a root to the freedom of creativity and as such, despite British broadcasting’s preoccupation with criticising commercial television and championing public service ethos, justifies the increase in commercial broadcasting structures that would be the inevitable consequence of the increase in cable and satellite television.

What this analysis offers is a perspective on the shifting discourses around creativity and cultural value that permeate the historical moments of crisis perceived in British broadcasting and the channels that were launched as remedies to such crises.

For Channel 4, its creative identity was to cater to diverse audiences, neglected elsewhere, to take creative risks and to create a “distinctive character” (HMSO, 1981).

Within the ethos of cultural value and public service, I have noted the ways in which different generic categories are found to manifest either claims to cultural value or the

characterisation of popular entertainment. Comedy is seen to occupy the position in this discourse of entertainment, not of cultural value. The next section of this thesis turns to the discourses of cultural value that describe the work of the departments that commission comedy, questioning how those who deal directly with comedy formats construct creative comedy work, and how the departmental categorisation of that which gets included under the Comedy Department commissioning remit continues to make distinctions of value dependent on the opposition of popular cultural forms, to the creative denotations of highly authored, innovative, risky and niche cultural texts.

## Section Two: The Institution

### Comedy Commissioning: Art, Luxury and Expense

The initial title of this thesis and the use of the word ‘Luxury’ to describe comedy programming stems both from the use of the word in a number of interviews that I held as part of my research and also as a way of problematising the definitions of culture that underpin so many of the debates around the quality, value and worth of cultural phenomena.

Deputy Head of Comedy at Channel 4 since 2012, Nerys Evans, repeatedly uses one of her commissions, *Noel Fielding’s Luxury Comedy* (2012 –) to define the kind of comedy programming that Channel 4 *should* be invested in developing. She uses the divisive response that the programme received to define its creative worth in the context of Channel 4’s public service remit:

“Some people fucking hated it...we were all going ‘fuck, it didn’t do the ratings’...but when I saw how people were reacting to it I was so proud, because it’s art, ultimately it’s funny but it’s so art, it’s rich, it’s so boutique”.

Despite the low ratings that Evans mentions, the programme was recommissioned and the second series was broadcast on E4 in 2014. The luxury of the show, its richness and art-ness, is used to argue for the programme’s value specifically to Channel 4, a value that is based in its creativity and its alternative appeal rather than its success with ratings or financial yield through advertising revenue where the show is expressly said to have not succeeded.

Again, Evans uses the show to characterise what Channel 4 Comedy should be doing: “if we’re not making shows that [make] you go ‘what the fuck was that?’ then what are we doing? Because we’ve got to be able to take creative risks”. While she may not be implying that this is the only kind of programming that Channel 4 comedy should be commissioning, it is certainly positioned as an essential part of their claim to creativity.

Former Head of Comedy at Channel 4, Shane Allen, uses the word ‘luxury’ to describe what comedy is in the context of British broadcasting production culture. His statement that comedies are ‘luxury items’, which are expensive to invest in and yield little in advertising revenue is pertinent for Channel 4 as a public service broadcaster with wavering commercial revenues to spend on producing content: “in lean times, comedy and drama are the first to get cut...because they’re *luxury items*, because they’re not money generators normally” [emphasis added]. For Allen, this cultural value of comedy, compounded by the financial instability of the genre, is also tied to public service, to Channel 4 and also to the BBC where he is now Head of Comedy, after leaving Channel 4 in 2012: “It’s an expensive genre, it’s a *risky* genre. So more commercial places tend to avoid it”.

As Channel 4 is funded by the purchase of advertising slots, the fee of which will increase if the programme is shown to gain higher audience figures, the statement that comedy is not a money generator is directly tied to the idea that comedy content is not appealing to large numbers of viewers: as Shane Allen states in his interview, “every time a comedy is on the air, it’s sort of losing the channel money”. As will be detailed further in review of the literature of cultural value, the expense of these genres and the lack of financial return they yield, is indicative of the debates around commercial gain being in direct conflict with creativity. For Channel 4 this creative output is in jeopardy whenever money is running low and the expense and luxurious-ness of the genre also renders it one that is unstable in a free market.

Not only are comedy and drama described as being of cultural exclusivity, for Allen attributes their cultural value to the contribution they make to a broadcaster’s creative reputation. Speaking of the time after *Big Brother* (Channel 4, 2000 – 2010) moved after ten years at Channel 4 to Channel 5, he states that there was a lot more money put into commissioning and developing Comedy because Comedy is channel defining and ‘reputational’. The rhetoric at the broadcaster was, he said, “okay we’ve lost this big revenue-making programme and we need to fill out with stuff that’s reputational...and talk about heritage and legacy”. While Allen says that comedy and drama both sit within the banner of ‘reputational’ genres, there is a distinction to be made between comedy and drama within this rhetoric of public service programming and cultural value. Comedy poses a more complex position in these hierarchies of cultural value: while Allen’s description suggests that comedy is expensive and it appeals to small, niche audiences, it is elsewhere described distinctly as low culture. This tension between high and low is particular to comedy and plays out not least in the departmental

categorisation of comedy programme types, as I will show below.

As well as the cultural product of comedy, Allen also uses the word 'luxury' to describe the experience of creating comedy in a favourable environment, one that he says he was unable to enjoy during his last months at Channel 4 and which was in part why he left for the BBC. Rather than referring directly to the size of the budget afforded to each comedy project, Allen specifically describes that what was missing was the time and space needed for comedy to grow: "...you don't have the luxury of a series where you're sort of growing and evolving, so you have to sort of start fully formed".

For Allen, this lack of luxury put pressure on the creative process for comedy producers and made the environment in which new writers were developing their skills and learning how to make their first sitcom or sketch show much more difficult. Whether or not this was true of Channel 4 when Allen left or if it is true at the time of this research is not the focus of this study. Instead, the implicit working environment that is said to benefit creativity in comedy here, gives us another example of the sense that comedy requires the level of resources that might also be afforded to genres of cultural value: time, space, money and the ability to take creative risks, to make mistakes and to have a chance to adjust failings.

Already, then, we start to see how the status of television comedy as a low cultural product, a popular entertainment form with little cultural value, as it has previously been discussed (and dismissed) in academia, comes to be much more complicated within the television comedy industry itself, even when it remains low in the television industry itself more broadly. It is by unpacking some of this language that we can see where certain discourses are reconstructed and others are problematised and as such a qualitative discourse analysis approach is required to make the connections between these denotations and distinctions of cultural value.

As the previous section of this thesis examines, the discourses that underpin British broadcasting are those that construct television as a very powerful medium, one that has the potential to serve great social responsibility, but also to be dangerous in its mass distribution of cultural phenomena and its messages. One of the ways through which the distinction between these good and bad forms of television is made is a process of generic classification; there are those genres within these reports that are legislated to preserve them and those

that audiences must be protected from. Cultural value is mediated by this generic categorisation and there is a sense through which comedy programming, as with entertainment, despite being a consistent inclusion in broadcasting legislation, is seen as fulfilling the public service ethos of British broadcasting to a lesser extent than other genres. This section examines the greater intricacies of the discourses around comedy's creativity at the institutional level where, as the interviews with commissioners at Channel 4 will show, comedy is said to have variant claims to quality and to creativity more nuanced and conflicting than those of at the macro industrial level.

I examine these interviews to understand how the genre is characterised within the institution in the wider context of other genre departments and the broadcaster's broader scheduling. As a reflection of the industrial construction of comedy found in the legislation, there are ways in which comedy is not seen as serious or culturally valuable as other genres and this is something this continues to be reproduced by those working in comedy itself. However, this section further positions this thesis in support of the notion that there is an extent to which even in what is broadly constructed as low culture or without great claims to creative value. It does so by examining the ways in which Comedy Department personnel construct the value of what they commission in relation to authorship, what it means for Comedy to be "scripted", creative talent development and the department's fulfilment of Channel 4's public service remit for diversity and innovation. It looks at the understanding that scripted comedy is that which is driven by one or two authors, facilitated through talent development, but hinges most importantly on the vision of the writer as the primary source of a programme's creative impetus and potential for success.

As such, this section demonstrates the ways in which Channel 4's Comedy Department banner is equated with conventions of quality and creativity and with big "C" cultural value, within Channel 4 as an institution, despite discourses that position Comedy as oppositional to cultural value and more "small time" in a broader industrial context (Mills, 2009: 2).

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### **Big ‘C’ and Little ‘c’ Distinctions: Culture, Creativity and Comedy**

Debates around the legitimacy of cultural artefacts and the measurement of their value permeate the study of culture, media and audiences. These debates have often observed a binary distinction between high and low culture, characterised by some as culture with a capital “C” or a small “c” (Jenkins, 1992: 128). As I’ve noted previously, and with the shift in focus and terminology between “culture” and “creativity” within government policy (O’Connor, 2010: 31), a similar distinction has been made within academia between “Big C (eminent) and little c (everyday)” creativity (Kozbelt, Beghetto and Runco, 2010: 23).

As noted in the previous section of the New Left Review article on differing politics of broadcasting systems, there is a tradition of debating the characterisation of television programming as a standardised, mass consumed product that contributes to the maintenance of ideological superstructures and the reconstruction of social and economic hierarchies. As Raymond Williams explored in *Television Technology and Cultural Form*, fears around television as a domestic medium have also been part of this distinction between high and low culture; because television is consumed in the home, because of the ways in which it is scheduled by broadcasters, because of its live-ness and constant availability, television is opposed with artefacts or phenomena of “high” cultural value, that are described as heavily authored, with limited availability and lower levels of consumption (Williams, 1974: 4-5). While Williams looks at the assumptions that are taken for granted when these fears around the effects of television as a technology are constructed, broadcasting legislation itself can be seen to make distinctions of cultural value within television content. It is here that I move this discourse of cultural value from the very medium of television itself, through the construction of generic categories and finally to the crux of this chapter’s argument, that within genre categorisation there are still distinctions made between superior and inferior modes of production.

The arguments within broadcasting legislation move beyond the fundamental fears around mass media implicated by both the cultural conservatism of Arnold and Leavis and the Frankfurt School’s critical theory. Rather, it takes as its starting point the understanding that television is a powerful part of Britain’s cultural landscape and that public service television has a responsibility to broadcast programmes that benefit society. As such, those beneficial programmes that would not be supported by a free market industry of purely commercial

stations must be publicly funded and regulated. As stated above, I argue that one of the ways in which these policies address the balance of culturally valuable television in opposition to other types of television, is through genre: there are some genres that should be supported by public service broadcasters with specific attention and those that do not need supporting or do not warrant it.

A key example outlined in favour of this perspective of this use of genre as distinction is seen in the Pilkington Committee's differentiation between the use of either celebratory language or cautionary instruction when evaluating different television genres and their purpose. These genres are also divided in terms of their visibility within these documents: there are those that have specific named sections for review, such as "News and Current Affairs", "Access and Party Political Programmes", "Educational Broadcasting", "The Arts in Broadcasting", "Films on Television" and those such as comedies, soap operas and game shows that appear within broader titles of "Programme Standards" and "Other Programme Issues" (Pilkington, 1964: iii). What this division between genres does is implicitly state which are culturally valuable and which are of less value. That there are those generic categories that warrant specific titled sections and those that appear within sections that address "standards" and "issues", furthers the distinction between genres that are constructed as visible and valuable, and those that are rendered invisible and more capable of harm. There are those that must be *supported* by the remit and those that must be *controlled*. Indeed, across the broadcasting documents analysed in section one, including the Pilkington Report, the distribution of cultural value is delineated in part by generic categorisation; documentary film, news and current affairs and educational programmes needed protecting and expanding, and soap operas, comedies and game shows warranted less thorough attention as they are of less social worth, beyond their entertainment value.

A study of this nature must call into account the studies of cultural value and associated socioeconomic hierarchies foregrounded by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's work *Distinction: A Social Critique on the Judgement of Taste* (1984). Bourdieu's work emphasised the extent to which taste is produced and reproduced through capital made available to those in privileged societal positions and as such those who are able to access and embody the status of what he refers to as "cultural pedigree" (Bourdieu, 1984: 54). As Bourdieu argues, those who sit in this position of socio-economic privilege have the power to access and reproduce these distinctions of taste and consequently, culture functions as one of the ways through which

these privileges are recreated: "...the dominant class constitutes relatively autonomous space whose structure is defined by the distribution of economic and cultural capital" (287). However, I would like to complicate these notions of economic and cultural capital with Simon Frith's suggestion that the operations of distinction that Bourdieu describes may not be limited to a binary construct of high and low culture exclusively. Frith suggests that within what might be understood by cultural elitists such as Arnold and Leavis to be low or popular cultures, there are still distinctions of quality, superiority and inferiority that operate. He also describes how these distinctions of superiority are, as Bourdieu describes of his research on French society in the mid-1960s, a social and discursive construction as much as economic.

Frith compares this Bourdieuan notion of the discursive construction of cultural value in high culture to his own argument around value in popular culture as enjoying the "richness and pleasure of the reading of cultural texts, not least because of the pleasure of displaying one's superior enjoyment and discrimination" (Frith, 1996: 9). Rather than the critical implications of Bourdieu's sociological approach, Frith is in some support of the activity of talking about value within popular culture. Frith describes of his own cultural experiences and research on popular culture, conversations around television, pop music, sport, magazines and films as a "common currency of friendship...[P]art of the pleasure of popular culture is talking about it; part of its meaning is this talk, talk which is run through with value judgements" (2). So as for Bourdieu's understanding of the mediation of cultural value through discourse as a privilege of a society's elite, Frith suggests that this method of privileging opinion is also operative in the consumption and articulation of taste around popular cultures such as television comedy.

This area of theory underpins my argument that it is not just the texts themselves that define the extent to which they offer cultural value; it is also through the construction of this value through the interaction and performance of cultural consumption and knowledge, particularly by those who sit in a position of privilege, who are able to define what it is that makes culture, essentially, good. Frith explains how consumers, and in particular "fans", invest in particular cultures, to determine what might be socially significant knowledge within its specific context, and then to gain cultural capital:

"...a similar use of accumulated knowledge and discriminatory skill is apparent in low cultural forms, and has the same hierarchical effect. Low culture, that is to say, creates its own capital – most obviously, perhaps in those forms (such as dance club

cultures) which are organized [sic] around exclusiveness, but equally significantly for the fans (precisely those people who have invested time and money in the accumulation of knowledge) of even the most inclusive forms – sports or soap operas, say" (Ibid).

Frith argues that the creation of value through implicit discourse and in explicit conversational commentary is, in itself, an important process of cultural activity and as such it is an important task to analyse such processes to broaden knowledge around culture and the politics of its consumption. For Bourdieu, analyses of such phenomena offer a vital site for understanding how these performances might reproduce socio-economic distinctions within a given society. As Frith suggests however, the operation of superiority and inferiority within popular cultural forms, which might otherwise have their complexities dismissed by what Bourdieu calls the "dominant class", and academia itself, are a vital site for analysis.

Frith's understanding of cultural distinction, then, underlies this chapter's questions around how, within the mass medium of television and the entertainment status of television comedy, there are still constructions of taste maintained through institutional discourse. These operate through comparisons to other genres within Channel 4's schedule and are further complicated by the participants' construction of the Comedy Department's social value, authorship and distinctiveness as a creative practice.

Frith also moves the study of cultural capital into ground more useful to the study of how genre itself is constructed and how sometimes contradictory distinctions are made within generic categories of, for instance, what is called 'comedy' within a broadcasting institution, either externally, to audiences, or internally, through departmental categorisation. This will be further explored in the third chapter of this section, when the discourses examined here about what defines the creative value of the Comedy Department will be compared to those present in participants' talk around Entertainment programming.

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## **“Fighting the Corner”: Seriousness, Legitimacy and Defending Comedy at Channel 4**

While I will look later to the talk around the Comedy Department's claims to creative value and public service, there is still a sense in the interviews with Comedy commissioners in which the perception of Comedy within Channel 4 is characterised by an inferiority when it comes to the broader concerns of the broadcaster's schedule. The interviews point to a construction of Comedy work as isolated and misunderstood and as a genre that, as the previous section outlined in the legislation, occupies a low cultural status position. For Deputy Head of Comedy Nerys Evans and former Head of Comedy Shane Allen the job of arguing for the importance of Comedy within Channel 4 is one beset with assumptions from outside the department that the creative priorities of the genre are not to be taken seriously when compared to documentary and news programming.

Allen understands his role as Head of Comedy as “fighting the corner” for Comedy:

“...my job, I see it as making sure that comedy gets represented, because it's quite competitive with other genres in terms of slots and the opportunities on online things...you just have to push the comedy agenda the whole time”.

While this might be said of any head of department looking after their genre's presence within a broadcasting institution, the particular hurdle here is that: “comedy by its nature isn't taken as seriously as other genres because of what it is”. For Allen, there is a lack of credit awarded within the industry to processes and difficulties of Comedy in comparison to other forms of television production: “you can intellectualise and you can analyse...you can have more articulate strategies about what to do in factual programming and knowledge areas”. However, Evans sees this perceived lack of seriousness in Comedy in contrast to other genres as part of the attraction of her role and relishes the different priorities with which her work is concerned:

“I think other bits of telly are sort of, so serious. I think I'm so blessed really, because I sit on, you know...big meetings with heads of department, and they're talking about documentaries and, [laughs] really harsh kind of terrible things that they're

uncovering on *Dispatches* [1987 - ]...and we're doing, you know, how many wank jokes can we do in *the Inbetweeners* – it's on the top of my to do list to get these swear words signed off so it's...really different".

While there is a sense here that what makes Comedy 'different' is an element of whimsy or that Evans' priorities are comparatively less important to those of other genres, she is also concerned that either she or others at Channel 4 use this lack of seriousness to underplay the hard work of the Comedy Department: "I don't want to do down how hard it is as well, I know how hard it is to make comedy...we obviously seem like the sort of slackers – not that we don't work hard". The self-awareness here that wavers between the work that goes into making Comedy and the perception that it doesn't hold the same importance as other genres, plays into the idea that creative value is determined by the extent of the difficulty in producing a cultural artefact (Storey, 2013: 7). It's in this quote that we see the clash between the broader industrial and societal construction of Comedy television as a frivolous product, without consequence and the institutional, or rather departmental clarity of the creative labour that goes into making Comedy and the lack of appreciation for it that broader discourses of cultural value lead to.

When I ask if the perception of a lack of seriousness that Evans describes is from within Channel 4 or more from the press or audiences, she talks explicitly about the difficulty with finding new talent and new ideas – two key aspects of Channel 4's remit. The responsibility for Comedy to be innovative and the pressure to produce a brand new concept each time a new programme is commissioned is what makes commissioning Comedy so difficult: "Every time we do something we are sort of trying to reinvent the wheel with brand new talent...there isn't a precedent". Despite the industrial discourse that I have called into account whereby documentary, amongst other television genres, have greater claims to cultural value than television, it is documentary that Evans ultimately says is in some sense easier as a format to reproduce:

"What's difficult about comedy, is that it's really precarious because you don't ever have a guaranteed hit...you can make a brilliant documentary or you know, 'Gypsies' [*Big Fat Gypsy Weddings* (2010-2014)] is doing really well so you can make something about gypsies...I'm not doing down their skills but there's...a common language, you can be quite descriptive...'give us another documentary on...'".

Again, as with Allen's talk about the extent to which documentary programming can be intellectualised and therefore more easily justified to the broadcaster than Comedy, Evans notes that there is a certain reproduction of documentary formats that is available to the Factual Department that is not possible in Comedy commissioning. The sense that this originality that the Comedy Department must seek out is risky, is also offset in the talk around the process of developing new ideas to ensure that a new idea, provided by new writing talent, can have the best chance at being successful.

### **Scripted Comedy and Authorship**

The first specific definition that describes the content of the Comedy Department's commissioning work is that it exclusively deals with "scripted comedy", which refers to situation comedy and sketch comedy. This is also a standard definition across terrestrial British broadcasters BBC (Comedy Commissioning, BBC) and ITV (What We Want, Entertainment and Comedy, ITV)<sup>2</sup>.

This distinction was first made in interview when I asked what involvement Shane Allen had had with the acquired American programmes that are listed on the 4od web site under the 'comedy' category. Allen noted that this had nothing to do with Channel 4's Comedy Department and that this was also true of panel shows and stand up performances as these are commissioned by the Entertainment Department. So specifically, Channel 4's Comedy Department work on programmes that are original British commissions and which are defined in this sense as 'scripted'.

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<sup>2</sup>The BBC's Comedy commissioning site features an interview with Shane Allen where he states: "In comedy commissioning primarily we commission scripted Comedy, which is sketch shows, narrative half hour sitcoms. What we don't look after are panel shows or stand up shows, they would come out of the Entertainment Department instead" indicating that this is a common misconception that should be corrected in this public forum.

ITV's Entertainment and Comedy Commissioning web site makes a similar distinction between "Entertainment and comedy entertainment" and "Scripted comedy" under the title "What we want?"

However, beyond this literal definition, there are further implications for the understanding of how Comedy is characterised here more broadly in relation to its cultural value. As will be examined, the development of new talent that is so central to the Comedy Department's claim to public service, specifically refers to the development of new comedy writers; as such the writer is positioned as the primary focus for new talent and the source of the creative impetus that motivates the production of a piece of scripted television Comedy.

Another quality used by Channel 4 to define the Comedy it seeks to commission is a sense of authorship: Channel 4's Comedy commissioning web site states that "Comedy at Channel 4 should be original, bold, and distinctive with a real sense of authorship" (Channel 4, Comedy Producers). Implicitly, a sense of authorship, or of there being an author, prioritises a singular creative vision rather than suggesting a more collaborative creative process. Again, with such an emphasis on the script and the development of writing talent, this both positions the comedy writer as the central voice of Comedy programming and reflects the notion that a cultural artefact that speaks from the individual creative voice, the artist or the artisan, is one with greater cultural and creative worth than that which is a collaborative effort designed by a community of producers with different roles and areas of expertise: "popular culture is mass-produced commercial culture, whereas high culture is the result of an individual act of creation" (Storey, 2013: 6).

Deputy Head of Comedy Nerys Evans talks about this sense of authorship as key when commissioning new programmes and states that an authored voice is what encourages her to take on a new script for development. This authored voice she seeks is bound in the distinctiveness that the Channel 4 remit demands:

"if [a script] speaks to us and it feels like only Channel 4 could do it...it's bold or it's rude, but not for the sake of it, but it's risky or it's a highly authored voice, which most of our shows I hope are...you go OK brilliant, do that".

As the quote above suggests, commissioning original ideas that wouldn't be made at or for any other British broadcaster is central to Evans' ethos on Channel 4 Comedy. As originality and innovation is prioritised, picking up certain scripts is restricted by what else is currently in production or has been produced recently. She notes the programmes that have sprung up since the success of *The Inbetweeners* that are based on young people in education: "now

we're being pitched everything to do with university or school, people have seen that and enjoyed it but you go, unfortunately we can't do that because we've done it!". Even if a well written script from a promising new writer was offered, Evans couldn't take it at this point if it was another Comedy based on a subject they or another broadcaster had covered.

The idea that the voice of the writer is a unique and focused one and guides the rest of the choices made in how to produce a Comedy programme, permeates the interviews with Evans and with Shane Allen. But there is a contradictory rhetoric here about the extent to which this voice has to be developed within the institutional practices of the Comedy Department's experienced commissioning editors. While both Evans and Allen talk about spotting new talent as part of their commissioning role and emphasise the idea that there is talent to be unearthed in specific individuals, they also describe the major work once having found a good script, in facilitating the connection between new writers and production companies with whom it is essential to collaborate to make the best version of the programme. So while there is a notion that a new writer can exhibit promise in a script, a creative flair, there must also be a process of writers learning how to make sitcom and sketch shows for television and how to work with production companies to develop distinctive new programmes.

### **Developing New Talent: Learning to Write Comedy**

Speaking about newly commissioned sitcom *London Irish* (E4, 2013) which was in production at the time of interview, Evans foregrounds the brand new talent on screen as a defining quality of Channel 4's commitment to its remit: "it's got an amazing cast of Irish actors who are unknown and that's what Channel 4's all about". The voice of the show however, is once again attributed entirely to the writer, Lisa McGee and it's the ability to offer McGee a platform for her unique story that is defended by Evans in the face of criticism:

"I know we're going to get in a lot of trouble from kind of, just the Irish for the stereotypical...how dare you portray us like drunks....but we will defend her right to do it because it's her story, it's her life and it's absolutely authored from her".

Part of what characterises the authorship of London Irish here is a sense of authenticity and this, despite some sense that the representation of a national identity might divide opinion in terms of stereotyping, is what justifies the artistic expression of the writer and Channel 4's choice to commission the show. This divisiveness is also central to the other elements of the broadcaster's remit to be progressive, to engage public debate and change people's perceptions, which will be explored more below.

The creative individual as Comedy writer and the creative idea are very closely linked here. For Evans, she will commission something if it's the right timing for "the right idea". But even though there is a creative moment that she is trying to access in commissioning, a script that should go into development, it is rare that that idea will be ready to go into immediate production. Again, the emphasis of the creative idea is placed on the writer: "...it's rare to give someone their first chance, just on their first script, you know it has to be re-written maybe eight or nine times before it's ready for telly".

There's a conflict here between the discourse around the creative individual as author and artist, with a single voice and "the right idea" and what Evans says about developing the skills to write a sitcom through writing sketch comedy.

"The big writers, from Sam [Bain] and Jesse [Armstrong], Graham Linehan, they all started on sketch shows...you earn your stripes and you write sketches, you learn how the TV process works, the comedy process...it's not always the way but I think it's a really good plan for writers to do 'I have got an idea, but I'll collaborate with someone on something first, or kind of submit sketches or do a radio series first'.

There is a process where writers learn how to write comedy, in contrast to the discourse that creative inspiration is a unique and unteachable phenomenon that is not available or accessible to everyone. This learning process is what gives writers their ability to articulate their particular style and voice and potential to be successful in the industry:

"[E]veryone's honing their voice to make sure they feel like they're distinct, because everyone's a comedy fan so you can't fail to be influenced by what you like and you might not have a very, kind of, clear voice of what your comedy is...I think going through that process definitely helps".

Once this learning process is advanced enough and a script has been developed enough to go into production, there are a number of ways in which the industrial know-how also has to be learned for new writing talent. While Evans points to the role of producer as having the specific responsibility to provide a conducive creative environment for new and potentially inexperienced writing talent, it's often the role of the Comedy Department to get writers in touch with the right producers in the first place.

"The producer is key in comedy, but very often you get talent coming through the door who have a great idea and want to do something and they haven't worked with a company, so we're then like a matchmaker. You go well, go off and meet these three companies and see who gels best? The relation with the producer is sort of so important".

Commissioning for Evans, and the process of putting new writers in the position to make the best show out of their first script is like matchmaking, mothering and pointing out what these new creative workers won't know yet about making television comedy:

"...because part of our remit is to work with new people and to kind of encourage new talent...it's sort of like being a mother figure... 'you need a good [director of photography] on this because it's very visual'...I'm calling producers saying 'have you got any good location managers? We need one'. So you do get quite involved".

These connections are a big part of how the Comedy Department is able to fulfil its remit to develop new talent from diverse backgrounds, but this work is separated from the creative work of the writer – implicitly, with the prominence of the writer as the creative source, these practical connections facilitate the author's voice rather than contributing to the creative quality of the show.

Shane Allen similarly divides the work of the Comedy Department's commissioning editors from other more 'creative' roles:

"Commissioning is more to do with spotting talented, creative people and enabling them and helping them and nurturing them when they're just starting. Once people

are established they don't really need that, you've got money and slots and support and all that. But I think it's trying to recognise and spot people".

The talented, creative people are the new source of material that Comedy is required to search out, but this divide puts a distinction of creative labour between Channel 4 as an institution and the writers as creative individuals. This ability to develop connections between new writers and producers also has implications for the part of Channel 4's remit that requires it actively pursues new talent from a diverse range of backgrounds and, as Allen points out, this is not an area that the Acquisitions Department can have the same claim to in personal and direct talent development.

#### **The Cost of Cultural Value: "Every time a comedy's on the air it's sort of losing the channel money"**

As already shown in quotations, Channel 4's 2013 remit is still charged with the responsibility to create alternative programmes, challenge perceptions, contribute innovative content and reach otherwise neglected television audiences and media consumers in British society.

Shane Allen describes Comedy as a genre that is significant to public service broadcasting because the expense and difficulty reaching large audiences makes it an unappealing risk for commercial broadcasters. He talks of Comedy programmes as:

"...luxury items, because they're not money generators normally. Very roughly *Peep Show* costs 300,000 [pounds] to make an episode, the revenue it would bring in would be roughly half that, the advertising revenue. So every time a comedy's on the air it's sort of losing the channel money".

This description then is underpinned by the idea that the duty of public service is to provide programming that cannot survive successfully in the commercial market; Allen says of Channel 4 and the BBC "there's just a perception that [Comedy]'s a thing that you have to indulge". For these public service broadcasters, Allen infers the cost of Comedy is one that

must be accommodated.

Allen goes on to describe why Comedy is worthwhile to public service broadcasters in particular, and commercial broadcasters to an extent also, as a “reputational” genre:

“[P]ost *Big Brother* there was a big explosion in 'okay, we've lost this big revenue making programme and we need to fill out with stuff that's reputational' – and people always look towards comedy and drama when they want to get a reputation and kudos and talk about their heritage and legacy”.

So not only is Comedy constructed as a genre that is culturally valuable and one that must be protected from commercial broadcasting priorities, there is a sense of an enduring value within a national cultural landscape. This idea of legacy and longevity is also linked to what Allen's description of Comedy as a genre that needs time to be appreciated; consequently it's problematic when other people working in broadcasting fail to take this into account. Allen says of the BBC: “there's more of a sense that things can grow over time here, I think. There isn't that 'ooh, that didn't do that well, we need to kill it off'”. When asked if this is a different from Channel 4 he states:

“Yeah, yes! I may as well have had a fucking laminated t shirt that went '*Peep Show* took three series to get from a very modest start to *there*'. *Inbetweeners* started with nearly 400,000 average...in that first series and that got to three and a half million by the third series. Comedy needs to grow”.

As well as these specific examples where time has been needed to produce multiple series of a Comedy programme before it will be a convincing ratings success, Allen offers a general domestic analogy to describe the need for patience with audiences while they become familiar with a series. He states that Comedy is like a family that moves into your street: “At first you're a bit suspicious, you think they're a bit weird...but then you get to know them and before long they're coming over at Christmas”.

What Comedy programmes need is the chance for audiences to become familiar with them and it is through the discourse of everydayness, not only of Comedy but television as a domestic technology, which makes this quote such a significant analogy to this study.

Raymond Williams' work on broadcasting technologies argues that it is the social behaviours and pleasures associated with television that originally encouraged its mass appeal: while television was seen as an inferior visual medium to film, he argues, the ways in which the technology developed and in turn the notion of broadcasting content is defined was through "the social complex – and especially that of the privatised home – within which broadcasting, as a system, is operative" (Williams, 1974: 23).

The analogy that Allen offers highlights this simultaneously social and private operation and gives Comedy the character of being part of the family and part of the domestic space of everyday life. The extent to which audiences can appreciate a programme grows with familiarity and familial-ity. The next chapter will look in more detail about how Comedy workers construct the importance of getting to know a character and writing character-appropriate responses to situations in sitcom within the creative process. But more broadly here, Comedy is understood at an institutional level as a genre that itself, programme by programme, imbeds itself into the domestic space: it's through the ongoing process of watching a series in this private environment and developing this familial relationship that the longevity and endurance of a Comedy programme is manifest. The dichotomy of this cultural technology as both "home-centred and mobile" is described in Williams' term "mobile privatisation" (Williams, 1974: 19).

This social and private investment by an audience is reflected in Allen's talk of Comedy as a genre that resonates slowly but once established endures for far longer than other genres and, he states, holds weight for a channel's "heritage and history". For a television broadcaster, according to Allen, Comedy, and also Drama, are genres that speak in this way to an institution's enduring validity and prominence in a society, central to a public service institution that has to continually prove its social value.

The ways in which Comedy is being celebrated here, as pertaining to Channel 4's public service remit and ascribing to discourses of cultural value reaching beyond commercial mass appeal, is what works to define a Comedy programme as 'successful'; a good or valuable Comedy programme is one that is highly authored, innovative and introduces new writing talent. In terms of audience reception, and in keeping with the remit to appeal to alternative and therefore potentially smaller audiences with each programme, success in Comedy is not determined by numbers necessarily: Allen defines Comedy's creative success as that which

is “most loved” rather than that which is most watched. There is again a discourse of cultural value as one defined by the depth of pleasure that an artefact evokes rather than its mass appeal or ability to garner advertising revenue at any given moment in a broadcasting schedule.

### **Distinctiveness and Divisiveness: Authorship and Cultural Discount**

Evans continues to characterise what makes a successful Channel 4 Comedy with the remit language of distinctiveness: she compares the creative style of programme she worked on at the BBC with the objectives she now considers commissioning Comedy at Channel 4. She notes that the broader appeal of BBC sitcoms is due to their less divisive nature but also that they tend to repeat subjects, styles or motifs in a way that is not problematic at the BBC:

“...with the BBC where you do big studio sitcoms with a certain tone, or old fashioned bent, you can do three or four of them and know you've got that audience who loved the first one and might love the second one...”

Her examples of these big studio sitcoms are *Mrs. Brown's Boys* (BBC One, 2011 - ) and *Miranda* (BBC One, 2009 – 2015), both of which have been accused of being too old fashioned in their format and style but have also reached huge audiences for the BBC<sup>3</sup>. For the BBC, at least for this style of Comedy, the popularity of these shows is oppositional to understandings of newness and innovation. Whether this is an accurate description of BBC Comedy broadly is contestable, but as an example of what Channel 4's remit does not allow its Comedy Department to do, the authorship that Evans constructs is one that speaks very strongly to alternative and potentially smaller audiences, rather than speaking broadly to large numbers of viewers:

“For [Channel 4] every show has to feel distinct, it has to feel like you probably

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<sup>3</sup> *Mrs Brown's Boys* was called a “predictable, vulgar vehicle for Irish comedian Brendan O'Carroll” (Mainstream comedy for the Middle Aged, *The Guardian*: 2011) and of *Miranda* one critic wrote “The jokes are about as original as a clown slipping over on a banana skin” (Just a Funny Old Fashioned Sort of Girl, *The Telegraph*: 2012).

couldn't see it on another channel...the Channel 4-ness is this sort of ethereal idea, but it is real...I keep going back to the authored voice. If you've got somebody writing who's for a very, not too specific, but an audience that you know will fucking love that, it won't be for everyone's taste but there will be a core that go mental for that, that's what we want".

This passionate core audience as a measure of success is used to characterise two examples that Evans gives for this niche but well-loved variety of Comedy: *Phone Shop* (E4, 2009 - ) and *Noel Fielding's Luxury Comedy* (E4, 2012 - ). For Evans, these programmes embody the divisiveness that comes along with the kind of authored voice she looks for in new scripts – passionately loved by small and steady audiences but ultimately alienating others by *having* such a specific creative voice, not by being broad or aspirational.

"Ultimately it is funny, but it's so art...they've made it in a shed basically and did all the animation themselves, they made the puppets...it was hand crafted and loved, and Noel said to me at the end 'I would've been paid more to be on a checkout, the hours I put into it and on what I got paid'".

Describing this project as a "labour of love" again Evans talks about the creative impetus being focused on the writer, in this case writer and star Noel Fielding. She laughs, "Make the show you want, Noel, a man with ice cream for eyes? Okay...what colour ice cream?". Again the job of the Comedy Department is talked about as one that facilitates these creative choices rather than making them: channel executives are problem solvers, not creators. While there was a negative reaction to its broadcast, in part due to expectations based on Fielding's previous collaborative work on BBC sitcom *The Mighty Boosh* (BBC2, 2004 – 2007) with comedy partner Julian Barrett, the positive response from a small and passionate fan base made the show, for Evans, a success: "it spoke really strongly to some people...if we're not making shows [where] you go 'what the fuck was that?', what are we doing? Because we've got to be able to take creative risks."

The idea that the truly innovative Comedy from Channel 4 takes time to find its audience is manifest here in the talk around *Luxury Comedy*: "[it's] almost too far ahead of the curve for it to be, sort of, popular, but retrospectively they'll go 'that was an amazing show'". Popularity is not included in Evans' definition of a successful Comedy and again the idea that audiences

need time to familiarise themselves with a Comedy programme, to learn its rules, particularly those that depart from television's thematic and stylistic conventions, is highlighted: there is a sense that Comedies that adhere to Channel 4's remit to be innovative, original and highly authored will struggle to rate highly with audiences straight away regardless of its potential or quality and in particular with experimental Comedy. And it is not the case that no Channel 4 Comedies will gain large audiences as *The Inbetweeners* did, but by allowing for programmes that challenge perceptions or speak from alternative cultural experiences, there is an inevitability to what Hoskins and Miris' call "cultural discount" (1988: 500). This refers to the effects on ratings caused by the alienation of audiences when broadcasting alternative, progressive or unconventional new Comedy content. As noted in Channel 4's remit, however, the ability to broadcast alternative content in a terrestrial context, is intended to allow audiences to become familiar with that which feels unfamiliar. Evans makes this equation between the need for patience with Comedy to the position that Comedy has to be risky, innovative and divisive and in these respects creative. A Comedy show may reach a small audience, but it can also have these positive creative characteristics and in fact it is a sign of real innovation if a Comedy is at first not well received – with the condition it resonates with audiences at some point. For Evans, it is her role to perceive the potential in a project and its author and invest time and patience while audiences become familiar with the show so it can grow in popularity.

The second example, *Phone Shop* (E4, 2010-2013) is similarly championed by Nerys for its special interest subject matter and how a certain sector of society will find a truth and familiarity with the style of the show and its characters that they wouldn't be able to find in a comedy anywhere else. Again, this initially small but passionate audience is tied into the notion that it takes time and patience for the programme to resonate more broadly. Evans talks about *Phone Shop* returning to E4 for its third series and Channel 4 receiving very positive responses from Twitter: "this is the best, thank fuck it's back, this is my favourite show...but it didn't start like that". Again because of its niche cultural references there was initial hostility to how the stories and characters were presented on *Phone Shop*:

"I remember when the first series went out, it was like they're making fun of rude-boys, and this is shit and I don't like the patois...and we go, well did we do something wrong with the marketing? Should we make it look broader and have less dub-step in it?".

On getting a negative response to the cultural references within the programme, the Comedy commissioners suspect that they have gone too far and alienated too many potential viewers. However, while consistently low ratings will ultimately invalidate recommissioning a series, it is more important that at least initially the broadcaster backs a project that does work around subject matters and references that will not necessarily reach broad audiences. Again, the writers are foregrounded as the justification for supporting the show and not meddling with its specific cultural references:

“...because they've got a vision, they want to make a show that they're proud of, and where the music speaks to them...when you see that audience...and you can see them quoting each line, or the fact that one of them's drinking Supermalt, to an aspect of an audience is fucking amazing, because they don't see that”.

The justification of these niche and exclusive cultural references is indeed authorship or vision – the sense that this is an honest portrayal of a part of British culture that otherwise is not addressed in Comedy, or the comedy of which is not addressed on television:

“It's urban culture, it's speaking like people speak in high streets and in shops, it's cultural references that you don't see in any other sitcom...I wish that was four million [viewers] a week but in a way it shouldn't be...it's so brilliantly written for a certain audience”.

Evans describes this relative immunity from concerns about ratings within a broader national industrial context: “We've been very lucky in that we've never had to kind of hit a rating...we're not like the BBC and we're not like Sky...as long as across our board we've got a really good healthy mix of shows that sort of appeal to broad audiences or...you can grow an audience with...”.

But again, there are concerns about ratings expressed and these are also connected to the temporal aspect of patience and giving programmes time to grow its ratings, through word of mouth: “that word spreads and that's why you have to invest in a second series and very often a third series, because you're growing an audience a sort of expectation. It's really hard to judge a show on its first series I think”.

But in what ways do those outside of the Comedy Department overlook how Comedy and its audiences are constructed by those who create and commission it? How do Evans and Allen understand audiences' reactions to new Comedy programmes and where do institutional discourses around cultural value conflict with those that characterise what is valuable about Channel 4 Comedy?

### **"It's not for me, so it's shit": Misconceptualising Creativity and Comedy at Channel 4**

The quote above is from Nerys Evans as she talks about some of the ways that people perceive a sense of ownership over the Comedy programmes that her department commissions and an authority over its quality. While this comment is part of her impression of audience reactions and the level of hostility she's experienced through social media, both she and Shane Allen commented on the ways in which Comedy can be misunderstood internally at Channel 4 as well and the frustration this causes. I have noted above that there is a sense in which Comedy commissioners must fight the corner for Comedy because of its precarious position in relation to other television genres. For example, as noted in the previous chapter, Allen talks about how Channel 4 executives outside of the Comedy Department hadn't been allowing for the patience needed for Comedy programmes to develop with audiences. What both these impressions suggest is that there is a way that Comedy is understood by those who commission, develop and produce it, but that this construction tends not to be shared elsewhere.

Given the discourses of creative value and public service that characterise Channel 4 Comedy noted at the legislative level, this section will examine where participants construct the idea that there are audiences who understand comedy to be a far broader slate than that which the Comedy Department are charged with commissioning. Secondly, this chapter will also look at how other television professionals are said to misunderstand Comedy and the extent to which this has been detrimental to Comedy workers.

While this does not prove in any sense that these constructs are how audiences or other industry professionals do in fact view Comedy programmes, it does reaffirm the talk around

the creative processes and values of Comedy that the department's personnel construct. By looking at how the participants talk about what is the wrong way to think about Comedy, we once again understand what they believe to be the right way to think about it and what it is that makes working in Comedy more successful, more valuable and more creative. In particular this chapter looks at how the characterisation of Channel 4 Comedy programmes as culturally specific, alternative and potentially divisive, clashes with the wider understanding that comic pleasures - funniness - operate on a universal and binary system of 'funny: not funny'. It's this misunderstanding of comedy generally and Channel 4's Comedy Department specifically that underlies the ways in which Evans and Allen talk about audience's lack of patience and the hostility towards new programmes.

While the first section of this thesis looked at how Comedy work is characterised by those in the commissioning department at Channel 4, this section looks not only to where this characterisation isn't shared outside of the Comedy industry, but also where comic pleasures are found elsewhere in the broadcaster's schedule. As such a clear understanding of what is made where should be established and where the potential for confusion might lie.

There are public, external statements made about what is classified as "Channel 4 Comedy" that conflict with the departmental categorisation of commissioning internally. The Comedy Department only deal with what is referred to as 'scripted comedy': on the Comedy Blaps web site that appeals for new writers to submit treatments for short sketch series that could be developed into a pilot for Channel 4, it clearly states:

"Please note that the Comedy department only deal with scripted comedy (like *Drifters* [E4, 2013 -], *Man Down* [Channel 4, 2013 -], *Peep Show*, *The Mimic* [Channel 4, 2013 -], *Toast of London* [2012 -] [and] sketch shows like *Cardinal Burns* [E4, Channel 4, 2012 -]). Studio shows including panel show ideas and stand up show ideas should be sent to the Entertainment department".

But while this public statement to those wishing to contribute to Channel 4's Comedy content makes this distinction very clear, the "Comedy" category on the 4od web site includes a more diverse range of formats. It's here that we start to see where generic terms function in more complicated ways, through such classifications and that comedy's perceivable pleasures operate in a more mobile sense. The fact that this statement even needs to be made suggests again that the public categorise comedy programmes differently to the departmental distinctions at Channel 4 and furthermore that Channel 4 is aware of this.

The “Comedy” section of the 4od web site lists, at the time of writing, as its top three programmes, *Peep Show*, commissioned by the Comedy Department, *8 Out of 10 Cats*, described as a “topical comedy panel show” and commissioned by the Entertainment Department and *The Mindy Project*, bought from American television network Fox by the Acquisitions Department .

Channel 4 also broadcasts recordings of stand-up comedy performances such as *Sarah Millican: Chatterbox Live* (On the Box Productions, 2011), *Peter Kay Live: The Tour that Didn’t Tour* (Goodnight Vienna Productions, 2012) or *The Channel 4 Comedy Gala* (Open Mike Productions, 2010-2013): all of these titles appear in the “Comedy” section of the 4oD web site.

The next chapter will look at why the separation of these comedic programmes into different commissioning departments effects how they are constructed in relation to creative and cultural value. Here, however, the emphasis is on how these conflicting ideas about what counts as “Comedy” contribute to problematic constructions of Channel 4 Comedy that frustrates and feels misrepresentative to its Comedy workers.

### **Audiences, Social Media and Hostility**

While it is understandable that audiences might not know which departments make these programmes which are variously categorised in user content as comedy, for Shane Allen there was something problematic about the lack of differentiation. He talks about the nostalgic view of Channel 4 Comedy but that the celebrated past he felt he had to compete with was unfair and “misremembered bollocks”:

“Channel 4 always had that halcyon thing when I worked there, like working anywhere I suppose, when people go ‘oh yeah, I used to really like Channel 4 but it’s gone downhill’, and you’d go ‘well, what did you like?’, and they’d go ‘I used to stay in on Friday nights and watch *Friends* [NBC, 1994 – 2004] and *Frasier* [NBC, 1993 – 2004] and *South Park* [Comedy Central, Productions, 1997 -]’, and you’d go ‘yeah, all the imports, basically?’. Or *My Name is Earl* [NBC: 2005-2009] or whatever, but it was all the imports. And it was really frustrating”.

Allen suggests that what he perceived as the most enjoyed comedy programmes on Channel 4's schedule were in fact bought in by the Acquisitions Department and what was particularly frustrating for Allen were the comparisons made between the kinds of comedy that was being commissioned at Channel 4 and the American sitcoms that the acquisitions department was importing. The lumping together of American acquisitions and British-made Channel 4 Comedy was problematic because of the broad appeal of the imports and the lower costs of buying them in: "I was always quite resentful of the American acquisitions, because they were cheaper than making original British comedy and they did better".

Not only is it problematic to compare British and American comedies based on ratings and their value for money in terms of advertising revenue, but comparing their style, tone and subject is also difficult because of the "aspirational" nature of American shows and the "grubby" everydayness of British comedies. Again there is a sense that Comedy commissioning is an overlooked and derided part of the overall schedule at Channel 4 when compared to the content provided by other departments.

"People would be like 'that's the problem with British comedy, American comedy's so glamorous and aspirational', and, this is specifically *Peep Show*, 'it's grubby and it's two blokes wanking in a room, why can't you make anything glamorous?'"

Allen indicates that the idea of being asked to make glamorous comedy misrepresents what he understands to be the remit of his commissioning process. Comedy at Channel 4 is constructed as a strange and somewhat under-the-radar part of the organisation, often misunderstood and something that only the commissioners really understand. The criticism of Comedy as a department that commissions programmes about everyday culture is so regular that it becomes part of how each programme is characterised within the institution:

"And I remember that used to be a running joke, you'd be brought a script and go 'is it about two blokes wanking in a room?' and you'd go 'no'. It would be the *IT Crowd* [Channel 4, 2006-2013] or whatever it was. But when we pitched *The Inbetweeners* you'd go 'No! There are four of them!'".

What Allen points out explicitly, is that comparisons made between British Comedies like *Peep Show*, the *IT Crowd* and *The Inbetweeners* and their American counterparts on Channel 4, are at best a misnomer and at worst derailing for British Comedy workers. The production process and production values are so different, in part because there is so much more money involved in American television production.

As interviews with participants in the third section of this thesis will indicate, the suggestion that British sitcom could gain higher ratings by imitating American sitcoms was a frustration and attempts to imitate the writing room structure that is the staple of the American comedy writing process have been unsuccessful. For Allen, it was inevitable that these fundamental differences between original British comedy and the American sitcom factory would leave Channel 4 Comedies in a position of low cultural value: “The production values and the aspiration stuff in Britain were so different, so it seemed like a poor relation. Ratings wise they would never do what American shows did”.

The harm that Allen suggests is that when American comedies are foregrounded, greater investment in new creative talent within the Comedy Department is side-lined. For Allen, the work of the Comedy Department and the programmes it commissions must be understood for its limitations in terms of commercial reach or a broad mass appeal and instead celebrated for its authorship and its encouragement of new and alternative voices.

As well as the problem of British and American comedy being compared, there is an issue with the quickness to react to new commissions by the Comedy Department. Allen’s perspective is “that comedy is a lot more loved retrospectively than it is at the time. People bestow classic status on something after it’s gone out”. He notes that audiences and television industry people that work outside of Comedy don’t understand how much investment has to go into a show before it is loved and he puts this into an historical context:

“...when *Fawlty Towers* [1975-1979] came out it got slated, absolutely panned. Because [John Cleese] was...a Python...how dare he do this crap old traditional sitcom and he was slaughtered at the time for that and they said he’d sold out. And this is *Fawlty Towers* for fucks sake, it’s amazing. And *Only Fools and Horses* [BBC One, 1981-2003] is another prime example of something that didn’t really connect or get any love ‘til the third series and now it’s probably the greatest loved British sitcom of all time”.

Allen also talks about this process of growing love for a programme over time as linked to heritage and to prestige. He uses the example of *Brasseye: Paedogedden!* (2001) which caused enormous controversy despite having had a low impact in terms of ratings:

“*Brasseye*, the [paedophile] special, I don’t know if that got over a million, it didn’t get one award, it didn’t make an impact at the time really at all, but yet it’s still held up as this amazing thing...”.

If the understanding here is that audiences don't recognise something as innovative and exciting until some sense of time and investment has taken place, then there is an initial negative reaction that occurs before this development of familiarity with a programme. To put it another way, a programme might be accepted as either a success once a discursively developed understanding of what cultural space the show occupies, or what it *is*, has taken place. In particular, this negative reaction is mobilised and exacerbated by the immediacy of social media response and giving rise to a new level of hostility and violent speech with which Comedy audiences express their disdain. Speaking about Twitter, Evans describes how the social media audience response is making launching programmes harder but that an instant negative reaction might not be the enduring one:

"you get the instant 'well this is shit' and it's the titles, you're going, 'watch the whole fucking thing before you say it's shit!' Very often people go 'this is shit' and by episode two, it's 'oh I quite like this' and they don't want to admit that they didn't like it...there's a badge of honour of going 'well I didn't give it more than ten seconds!"

The extremity of these initial reactions is also described as very much specific to Comedy audiences and that Comedy audiences have certain expectations that other genres don't have to live up to in the same way, namely that all new styles of Comedy will be appealing to everyone:

"on no other genre would you have someone Tweet or write or say 'whoever commissioned this should be strung up'...we had one pinned up on the wall because it said 'whoever commissioned this, I would like to shoot their family in the face'...and we were going, what other genre in television would you have this reaction?...you'd never say that about a drama – 'this is shit, I don't like the way this is shot'. You just don't watch it do you? You go, oh I'm just not that into *Luther* [BBC, 2010-2013] or I'd rather watch so and so...".

I ask about the reasons why this kind of reaction is specific to Comedy audiences and if it's to do with the perceived transparency of the genre's production or the realism associated with the content. "No, they feel cheated if it's not their comedy, so they go 'well it's not for me so it's shit'". There is a sense here that Comedy audiences have a low tolerance for programmes that are suited to and resonate with very specific audiences, and a lack of understanding that that is in fact what Channel 4's remit, according to Evans, charges their Comedy commissioners with finding. The highly authored voiced of some projects, that both

Evans and Allen say is key to an innovative new project for Channel 4, is in a sense inevitably divisive in contrast to a Comedy on a commercial broadcaster that seeks to reach as large an audience as possible, or a programme for BBC One that seeks to be popular in the ratings to show the public service broadcaster's ability to engage with the population en masse.

### **Internal Strife: Channel 4 Personnel and Doubting Comedy**

Not only is there a problem with audiences making comparisons between US and UK Comedies, Allen also speaks to the moments when within the institution of Channel 4 expectations to compete with the comedies acquired from American networks has frustrated him.

For Allen, there is a misunderstanding of *how* British Comedy is made, which leads to ill-conceived comparisons to acquired US sitcoms and his being asked to do the impossible: “There’d be the odd ‘in America they do runs of twenty six, why can’t we do twenty six *IT Crowd*s?’ and not really understanding the authorship that goes into that”. Here this sense of authorship is what makes British comedies distinct from their American counterparts and is too vital for Allen to risk compromising:

“We’re always under pressure to find a team-written show and try the American model or the mass produced stuff...I see the shows that have been done that way and I don’t think they’re going to be the ones that endure forever. I like the sense of authorship you have here. I like the massive variety you have here, I think they’re a little bit more homogenated [sic] in American comedy in that studio sitcom model”.

For Allen, the quality of British television comedy, both in the sense of value and what characterises the tone, is again a focused authored “voice” and a heritage that is not present in American sitcom:

“They get 40 writers on a show and they’re Harvard educated, brilliant, the standard is amazing, but there’s less schmaltz to British comedy, there’s more honesty and bravery and brilliance and surrealism and throws back to music hall and just a richness to British comedy”.

This description speaks, with enthusiasm, to the idea that the ways in which British Comedies are produced allows for more niche, focused voices, whereas the high “standard” of the American writing team process is dismissed as implicitly not having the same claims to heritage and “richness”.

American sitcoms might become what Allen calls “global imperial institutions”, but there isn’t the space for development that the British industry offers. In the case of Channel 4, this ethos is vital as their remit to encourage new creative talent is central to their creative identity and purpose and constructed as an avenue through which people can *learn* to make Comedy. Thus, in failing to make distinctions between what American comedies are and what they do, and British Comedy’s claims to innovative production methods and authored voices, there is a danger that the popularity of American sitcom on Channel 4 might stifle what Channel 4 Comedy is specifically tasked with doing: providing programmes that are qualified as successful not because of high ratings but the extent to which they challenge expectations and provide a new way of making Comedy.

The comparison, then, between American and British television Comedy at the time that Allen was working at Channel 4 was unhelpful in terms of what was creatively achievable and what was financially sustainable. To compare *Friends* to *Peep Show* is problematic within the broadcaster as the two programmes perform different roles within the institutional obligation to both generate revenue and use any subsequent profits to bolster the development of creative talent and the diversity of British broadcasting. This is not to suggest that Allen is denying any creativity of discovering, purchasing and scheduling acquired comedy, but the comparison does expose these different dimensions of Channel 4’s structure and the ways in which departments adhere to them in contradictory ways.

### **Investing in Innovation: Taking Time and Taking Money**

What is central to both Evans and Allen’s constructions of Comedy as a genre, is the time it takes for audiences to become familiar and appreciative of comedy programmes such as in Allen’s analogy of new neighbours moving in next door. This temporal question is directly linked to expense and Channel 4’s public service: Allen constructs the financial cost of allowing audiences time to develop as something that a public service broadcaster can give

that commercial broadcasters tend not to. In this sense it's the responsibility of the broadcaster to be patient with this process and to let scripted comedies take root, and it's this patience that Allen states as having been missing at Channel 4:

"I was starting to get exasperated that when a new show launched, people would go 'why's that not been an instant hit?'. And you go 'well, because none of them ever fucking have been?'".

The tension that Allen describes about convincing those at Channel 4 outside of the Comedy Department to give a show time to resonate suggests that this is a unique issue for Comedy programming as he has to regularly remind people that this, specifically, is how television Comedy works.

So if this exasperation is linked to Allen's wish to fulfil the Comedy Department's role to develop talent and to create a kind of programme that will be loved increasingly over time, then this perceived lack of understanding from the broadcaster is where we see the complicated balance between Channel 4's public service status and its advertisement sourced self-funding having a negative impact on the creative work in Comedy.

For Allen, Comedy was affected by this balance, or imbalance, as the genre was used to bolster the broadcaster's creative identity during big changes in scheduling – he refers specifically to the end of *Big Brother* (Channel 4, 2000 - 2010) – but is then quickly dropped again at points of financial crisis. He also states that the broadcaster was allowing Comedy to drop out of the commissioning and scheduling altogether:

"Comedy at Channel 4, there would be boom and bust cycles basically...Caroline Ledy who was my old boss, she's amazing...she alluded to a time when they were thinking of not doing comedy anymore".

He also talks about when he first arrived at Channel 4: "there were only five or six comedies a year on Channel 4 back in 2004, and half of them would be returning like *Peep Show* or *Green Wing* [Channel 4, 2004-2007]...we were doing two or three new comedies a year which really wasn't that much. So it did grow, it did grow. And then sort of, two years ago it contracted again a little bit".

One of the key elements that made Allen's work in the Comedy Department at Channel 4 difficult was the ways in which financial cycles made the channel's interest in Comedy production unstable or fearful. Because Channel 4 relies on its advertising revenue rather than government funding or a license fee such as the BBC, the concerns that Allen describes

of a commercial broadcaster still at times apply. He compares how this affects the security with which he was able to budget for programme production at Chanel 4 with the greater consistency in how much money Comedy is allotted now he works at the BBC:

"It's different at the BBC because there is that public service thing where you know...what the comedy revenue is going to be each year. So I can kind of come up with a three year plan for talent at the pilots you can do and the amount of investment in the kind of scripts you can do. Whereas at Channel 4 you'd get this kind of pinball machine where 'it's gonna be thirty million a year!' - 'no it's not, it's 17!' - there's no consistency there so you feel like a rabbit in the headlights and that makes you less confident about committing to people. There's nothing worse than saying 'come and work with us! Come and do a script and...a pilot with us!' and then you can't follow that through".

So not only was this instability in funding disruptive for Allen, it specifically affected the extent to which he could invest in new talent, one of the central elements to Channel 4's public service remit. If this unstable financial environment effects how Comedy can contribute to the broadcaster's remit so fundamentally then the funding model here is clearly at odds with the creative processes of commissioning and developing new Comedy. With the Frankfurt opposition of commercialism and creative value in mind, the creative characterisation and value of Channel 4 Comedy is magnified by its opposition to making money.

When I ask what kind of television was commissioned more often during times of financial crisis and what kind of television is safer than the risky experimental Comedy that Channel 4 otherwise used to define its creative identity, Allen mentions "cheaper genres, like reality, factual, factual entertainment shows". The creative worth of these genres to the institution of Channel 4 is questioned by Allen and directly contrasted with the programming he oversaw in the Comedy Department:

"You look at those fixed camera rig things, something like *Gogglebox* [Channel 4, 2013]...probably costs way less than a hundred grand an [episode] to make and probably rates more highly. But they're a bit more ephemeral, disposable bits of telly, they sort of capture the *Zeitgeist*-y type thing and then they're gone. And I'm more interested in things like *Father Ted* that people will watch forever".

The creative worth of a type of television is something that is attached to financial justification with specific relation to the temporal. Furthermore, these are departmental definitions being used to distribute this kind of cultural value.

As with the construction of audiences, both Shane Allen and Nerys Evans talk about the extent to which Comedy programming takes time to develop in popularity and therefore it is important for channels broadcasting Comedy not to judge its ratings too quickly – this is integral to maintaining the effective contribution that Comedy makes to Channel 4's public service remit. Within the institution this manifests as a relationship between the speed at which creative development takes place, expense of production in relation to advertising revenue and the time it takes for the content to resonate with audiences. Ultimately the judgement of quality through an understanding of institutional value is attributed to the Comedy Department content which is not attributed to other “cheaper” genres. This value is also bound in the ways in which these programmes are characterised by their production methods.

### **Leaving Channel 4 Comedy: The “New Regime”**

Referring again to the instability of the funding that Comedy was allocated and the slots that were made available to Allen while he was head of the department, he describes the “boom and bust” culture he experienced. He reflects upon the period before he left when, after the end of *Big Brother*, the ethos at Channel 4 was “to spend money in order to find successes and to invest heavily to show the channel still has loads of exciting range to it”. This meant investing specifically in both Comedy and Drama, which are, according to Allen, the more “reputational” types of programming.

But again, due to the broadcaster's need to source sufficient funds there was a down turn in what was made available:

“the advertising market went a bit [makes downward noise] and they just started drawing back on stuff. That's part of the reason I wanted to come here, because you were looking for the barrel of not having any slots or money”. Allen is very specific

about why this change happened and attributes it not just to a shift in the advertising market but also to “a new regime”.

He begins by talking about what was good about working under Kevin Lygo, the Head of Comedy and Entertainment at Channel 4 between 1998 and 2001 who then became Director of Programming and Content in 2003. The positive ways in which Allen describes Lygo is through his heritage in Comedy and his ongoing commitment and understanding of how it should be made: “[he] had come up through comedy and entertainment and he used to write on the *Two Ronnies* (1971-87) and work on the BBC”. The notion of Comedy's sense of heritage is reflected not just in the comedy text as Allen and Evans both have constructed, but in the industry's workforce too; Lygo's knowledge and commitment to Channel 4 Comedy is attributed to his experience and longevity in the business and is unique to those with experience in other areas of television:

“He really protected comedy in a way that people from more news and factual backgrounds probably wouldn't. He understood that it's a really [pause] torturous process. It takes longer than you think it's going to take, the talent involved are quite demanding and challenging and high maintenance...he'd come from that world and understood it and was sympathetic and knew that things took a long time to grow and find their feet”.

Again, the prime way in which Lygo's work is praised here is through experience, knowledge and most of all patience. Allen talks about this knowledge and experience in relation to Andy Cohen, the Director of Programming at the BBC at the time of interview and former Channel 4 employee, as well:

“[Cohen] ran E4 when we did *Fonejacker* [E4, 2006-2008]. And [pause] he gets it...he's a brilliant bloke, he said to me...if you come, comedy will be protected and all these things that I'd had at Channel 4. He really gets comedy”.

What Allen used to have at Channel 4 and what he enjoys at the BBC, is the protection of the genre by those outside of the department itself, with regards to funding, slots and potentially encouraging or cancelling whole projects. What is crucial to providing a space in which Comedy is allowed to be made in the right way is access to what it means to make Comedy, to *get Comedy* – and what Allen describes as most damaging for Comedy are the misguided expectations of those who intervene in its commissioning.

“Comedy always had this protected glow around it under [Lygo]. And then a different regime came in and [comedy] was kind of approached in a way that...the more factual genres [would be analysed]: is this going to be a hit? What's that say about modern society?”

The idea of predicting whether a new Comedy show might be a hit is again oppositional to what really matters to Allen in terms of creative success; the journey of developing and allowing time for shows to evolve. How factual programmes are valued is also positioned as opposed to how Comedy should be valued as well as the production processes of the two distinct types of programming:

“There was a lack of empathy and understanding of 'ideas start here, and they end up here'. And you have to go on a journey with whoever's conceived that idea or written it or performing it. And you can't be frantically analytical about it or project whether it's going to be a success or not”.

The work of Channel 4's Comedy Department is characterised as one that facilitates the vision of a particular author and is dependent on being new and, to an extent, unfamiliar; it is in this way that it fulfils its remit to develop new talent and challenge existing expectations. For Allen, the problem with attempting to analyse Comedy from an outsider perspective, separate and un-empathetic to this authored voice, is that it assumes that the broadcaster knows better than the creative worker and this goes against the authorship that is constructed as so pivotal to Comedy production. Allen states that it is important to take a step back as commissioner to allow the development of the creative author:

“You have to back people with originality and go on a journey with them...you can't approach it too forensically as an art form...”

This idea that new and almost definitively inexperienced creative workers are the source of innovation and creativity for Channel 4 Comedy is supported again when Allen talks about leaving because his own experience of success might spur repetition in future projects for the department:

“I'd been there seven years and I think post *Inbetweeners*...start[ing] really small, then it's this massive TV show, then the film...after that I didn't want to be the guy who stayed there and said 'well when we did *The Inbetweeners*...' there's only so far you can go.”

Allen's talk around why he left Channel 4 is focused largely on the extent to which 'the new regime' to which he refers failed to keep to the public service remit to be innovative and champion new creative talent, which again shows how central the notion of social purpose is to the Comedy Department's work:

"[Channel 4] was there to be more pioneering, to do more interesting work and not to cover things that have been done before. To not poach talent that was established, it was there to grow talent...I held the ethos that Channel 4's duty was to find and grow things...and that changed to wanting more instant mainstream talent".

This move towards more established talent is described as a move towards bigger audiences and again juxtaposes the remit with a form of success that is defined by big ratings and the bigger advertising revenue associated with it.

"Built in guaranteed audience-ship, and I didn't really feel that was what Channel 4 had been set up to do and its purpose once was. I thought it was about discovering and nurturing and finding the new Chris Morris or Charlie Brooker. So...by the end, I didn't really know what Channel 4 was, what the purpose of the commissioning strategy [was]".

There's a very clear statement here that what Allen perceives to be the crisis in Comedy, and what contributed to his departure from Channel 4, is the loss of creative focus that the public service remit had previously so distinctly described. While Allen talks about enjoying his work at the BBC that includes working with established talent such as Steve Coogan, the League of Gentlemen or Vic Reeves and Bob Mortimer, he also directly states that he is able to do at the BBC what he was unable to continue doing at Channel 4, which again reaffirms what purpose he constructs Channel 4 as having:

"...you've got BBC Three which is sort of what Channel 4 was maybe five or ten years ago – do the risky stuff, do the stuff with new voices, there's no pressure for it to be an instant massive hit, and you can give people a leg up...it's still good, you've still got the kind of ethos of Channel 4"

So for Shane Allen, the diversification of the BBC through its engagement with multi-channel portfolio programming has created a space for the kind of Comedy that he previously saw as Channel 4's responsibility. Risky, new and accommodating to new audiences are three key elements of Channel 4's public service remit and if these are being catered for at the BBC

and, as Allen argues, then perhaps Channel 4 has achieved the goal outlined in the Annan Report – to be creatively risky and set an example for all British broadcasters. Has Channel 4 rendered itself obsolete by achieving such a goal or does the criticism of Channel 4's fulfilment of its remit show that it is still pushing boundaries and challenging expectations?

### **Comedy with a Capital 'C': Departmental Categorisation and Cultural Distinction**

As noted in the previous chapter, that which is listed under the "comedy" category on Channel 4's streaming site 4od is not always programming commissioned by the Comedy Department; foregrounded content also includes programmes commissioned through the Entertainment Department and Acquisitions.

As such I distinguish between Channel 4's internal and external definitions of Comedy: that which is defined by the broadcaster's departmental organisation as Comedy with a capital 'C', and that which is categorised as 'comedy' on 4od but is not commissioned by the Comedy Department itself as comedy with a small 'c'.

The purpose of this section is to highlight how the discourses around creativity and cultural value that construct the work of those in the Comedy Department, differ to those that appear in talk around the work of those departments that make comedy with a small 'c'. This chapter examines how the creative work of these different departments is constructed by the Head of Entertainment Justin Gorman and commissioning editor of Entertainment Tom Beck. I examine the extent to which discourses around Entertainment's production processes or Acquisitions' buying in of comedies pertain to claims to Channel 4's remit or to its commercial funding structure and as such how the construction of cultural value around these department's differ to those that describe the Comedy Department. By looking into how these different commissioning roles are constructed by employees of Channel 4, this chapter will show what impact such distinctions have on the production of understanding around television genre and what it means to commission and develop comedy.

As will be shown in the literature, there are certain types of television comedy that are largely absent from academic scrutiny, such as comedy panel shows, stand up performances and chat shows. What will be shown through analysis of the interviews is how the comedy-ness

of some types of programming, and thus its claims to public service and cultural value based on the discourses examined in the analysis of broadcasting legislation, is rendered invisible or at least of less significance within Channel 4 because they fail to fit into the strict departmental classification of “scripted comedy”.

Firstly this chapter looks at the literature around methodologies of researching genre: while traditions of genre theory focus on the analyst's classification of texts through its exhibition of comparable structural conventions, I argue that it is essential to look at how wider discourses contribute to generic classifications in a number of often conflicting spheres – that is, to examine the production of genre as a discursive and mobile operation. My approach is one that positions genre as an ongoing process that exists outside of the generic text, as Jason Mittel argues: “genres are cultural categories that surpass the boundaries of media texts and operate within industry, audience and cultural practices as well” (Mittel, 2001: 3). This is a study of industrial constructions of Comedy based on the parallel but conflicting discursive sites of Channel 4's generic definitions.

Secondly I note how “comedy” is categorised on the 4od web site, in the context of other modes of compartmentalisation and identify this as a discursive platform. The departmental distinctions that have been highlighted will then be explored through their shifting definitions, particularly with regard to Comedy and Entertainment. Such shifts feed into the notion that departmental classifications as generic classifications, are moveable and as such the classification of genre itself is a mobile and continuous construction based on extra textual definitions and the discourses under which they are made.

This chapter's analysis in the main, however, will be on how commissioners and heads of department who work on the programming that is listed on the 4od site as “comedy” talk about their work and to what extent discourses around creative value that appear in this talk, appear in the talk around “comedy” work elsewhere at Channel 4.

Using discourse analysis to show how those working in these different departments construct the creative processes and creative impact of comedy commissions with conflicting claims to public service, audience reception and the broadcaster's creative identity, this chapter contributes to broader theory around the distribution of value in creative labour and the ways in which cultural value is implicated through such distinctions.

As stated, the three departments with which this meso level study of Channel 4 is most broadly concerned are the Comedy, the Entertainment and the Acquisitions Departments,

as the content of these are the three common departments is most often included in 4od's Comedy category. The primary and most detailed comparison of departmental distinction, however, will be made between the Comedy and Entertainment Departments, a methodological choice based on the inherent links between these now separate but once combined generic forms.

This study focuses on a snapshot of those working for Channel 4 during the course of this PhD, to understand the construct of creativity and comedy at the broadcaster in a specific timeframe. The choice to interview Shane Allen for this research is motivated by some of the departmental changes that occurred up to and during the time Allen left. This study, and this section in particular, examine how these changes continue to manifest for those working at Channel 4, and contribute to the the construction of creative value and comedy within this organisation.

As such this chapter understands comedy in two ways, pertaining to small 'c' and big 'C' comedy respectively: comedy as a mode, included in a variety of television programmes, and comedy as a genre, a set of conventions that allow the use of the word "comedy" as a strict noun: "as in...I saw a comedy on television the other night" (Neale and Krutnik, 1990: 16). As I classify Entertainment commissions as 'comedy' through Channel 4's online categorisation I argue that it is connoted with modal comedy and that the departmental classification of Comedy refers to comedy, the form or the strict noun. The interest this chapter has in this distinction between mode and genre, is that Comedy and Entertainment commissions, despite their formal separation were the responsibility of the same department. What now, characterises Comedy and Entertainment commissions and how does this new departmental distinction highlight the variant claims of each genre to cultural value and creativity?

### **Histories of Channel 4 Comedy and Entertainment**

Entertainment has rarely been addressed as a either generic category or departmental category in its own right. The wealth of academic work on Channel 4 and its position in the British broadcasting industry was written around the time of its launch and only a few years after. A more recent study in 2008 by Dorothy Hobson, however, looks at how what she calls the "legacy" of the first years of Channel 4's inception and its infancy in broadcasting,

informed the corporation into the twenty first century. She talks about the historic understanding of Entertainment at Channel 4 and constructs the closeness with which Comedy and Entertainment were entwined. She describes the experience and work of Channel 4's first commissioning editor of Entertainment Cecil Korer:

"His entertainment record was certainly different from some of the ITV brash comedy forms. However it would never be described as being at the forefront of innovative comedy, which was certainly present on BBC Two both in some of the situation comedies and in the entertainment coming from the variety departments" (Hobson, 2008: 119).

So comedy is used here in the literature to define the innovative-ness of Entertainment on Channel 4 – there is no differentiation between Entertainment and Comedy. Hobson then uses Channel 4's own public statements about Entertainment to explain her judgement of the comedy of the time as lacking in innovation. According to Hobson, Channel 4's information brochure, published in 1982, the year of the broadcaster's launch, writes dismissively of Entertainment as a category of programming: "It was hardly a mixture to set the audience falling off their sofas. 'We all need a laugh' sounds like a bodily function needing to be satisfied" (Hobson, 2008: 118). Hobson links this dismissive language to the creative and cultural value of these programmes. However, this is dependent on her analysis of Korer's Entertainment commissioning as one that failed to deliver the innovative programming she links to BBC 2.

She then talks about a "change in strategy" (120) and "a new regime" (121) for the department when a new senior commissioning editor of Entertainment, Mike Bolland, was brought in to replace Korer in 1983. She states that this caused a shift in the department from the "wide-ranging fairly middle of the road type of representation of the genre, to a more radical and targeted form of comedy" (118). Again, there is little distinction between comedy and entertainment here as departmental classifications. However this account does reflect the discourses around these two categories that I highlight in this chapter, when Hobson uses the term "wide ranging" in reference to "the genre", to the "Entertainment" department, but the terms "radical and targeted" in reference specifically to "comedy". So there is a sense even here in analyses of Channel 4, rather than just in the broadcaster's own documents, that there is an implicit distinction of Entertainment as a mass appeal television genre and Comedy as a more niche, innovative genre. We see here how academic work that

relies on the interpretive structural analysis of the television text can be reflective of, rather than reflexive upon, the discourses that underpin interpretations of quality.

More recently, these areas of programming have become distinctly separated by institutional departmental organisation, and the distinction of the creative identity between Comedy and Entertainment persist into the period at Channel 4 I analyse here.

Before his departure in 2009, the processes of commissioning both Comedy and Entertainment at Channel 4 were conducted under one department run by Andrew Newman. Newman left Channel 4 to become chief creative officer at independent production company Objective, who produced Channel 4 Comedy commissions *Peep Show* and *Pete versus Life* (Channel 4, 2010-2011), as well as other Channel 4 content including *Balls of Steel* (Channel 4, 2005-2008) and several series and one off specials with illusionist Derren Brown. On Newman's departure in October 2009 it was announced that one of the commissioning editors for Comedy, Shane Allen, would be appointed as Head of Comedy at Channel 4 and that there would be a separate Head of Entertainment Department appointed at a later date. On Newman's departure it was decided, under Head of Channel 4 at the time Julian Bellamy, that Comedy and Entertainment would be divided into two separate departments. In December of the same year it was announced that Justin Gorman would be the head of the new autonomous Entertainment Department.

The clearest distinction between what would be a Comedy commission and what would be Entertainment is in the distribution of programme format: "scripted comedy", described as sitcom and sketch comedy, would be housed at the Comedy Department and other comedy formats would be handled by Entertainment. These other programmes are those that Channel 4 refers to as comedy online, such as comedy panel programmes, live comedy gigs and the Channel 4 Comedy Gala. So in the discourse of Channel 4, the term "scripted comedy" as a definition of the Comedy Department's output holds connotations of the kind of "radical and targeted" programming that Hobson relates to innovation. With the distinction between these two departments in mind, this study looks to how these departments, separate since 2009, fulfil their responsibilities within Channel 4's public service and financial structures and in what sense these compliment or compromise one another within the collective identity of Channel 4 comedy.

While discourses that construct this departmental shift concerning Comedy and Entertainment is the focal site for analysis, there are points where the role of the Acquisitions Department is talked about by the participants. This is pertinent again because many

comedies acquired from networks in the United States contribute to the online 4od category of Channel 4 “Comedy”. Hobson also includes the role of Acquisitions in her description of the evolution of Channel 4 Entertainment: “The early comedy, entertainment and imported programmes, which was part of the Cecil Korer era, and the newer style comedy...which Mike Bolland initiated” (123). Hobson's history, then, names the work of what are the Comedy and Acquisitions departments under a wider banner of Entertainment.

However, with this importance of Acquisitions in mind, there is also a methodological caveat to be made at this point in the analysis as there were no Acquisitions commissioners available for interview during the period of collecting materials, so any discursive construction is made by those elsewhere in the institution – though still primary evidence, a secondary description in terms of cultural work.

This is not perhaps surprising however due to the Acquisitions Department at Channel 4 being far less visible than the Comedy and Entertainment Departments more generally. There are Comedy and Entertainment categories on the 4od web site where there are often overlaps where programmes appear on both, but there is no category for the imported programming acquired from outside the UK – such programmes sit within other generic categories. There are also far fewer public statements made, in the form of interviews and press releases, around acquired programming or with Acquisitions editors. In this sense the role of acquired comedy programmes which appear on the 4od web site are included, not distinct from Comedy: imported sitcoms such as *The Big Bang Theory* (CBS, 2007 - ), *New Girl* (FOX, 2011 - ), *How I Met Your Mother* (CBS, 2005 – 2014), *Two Broke Girls* (CBS, 2011 - ) and *The Mindy Project* (FOX, 2012 - ), are not acknowledged through 4oD's categorisation as being separate to the Channel 4 Comedies which have been developed or commissioned directly through the broadcaster.

The discourses, therefore, around creativity and what pertains to greater creative worth around the Acquisitions method of comedy scheduling is less accessible and open for analysis. However, the lack of public statements made by Channel 4 about the work of the Acquisitions Department implicitly suggests there is less need to promote such scheduling within the public service identity of the broadcaster. The importing of comedy from the United States is not a transparent one in the sense that this is still under the Channel 4 Comedy categorisation, not advertised online, for example, as CBS or NBC comedy. However there are statements within the participants' interviews that qualify the work of buying in comedy which complicates this further, and in doing so allows for some analysis of the role

of Acquisitions as understood within Channel 4. Indeed, a key query for how Acquired Comedy is understood at Channel 4 in relation to the Comedy Department's commissions, at a channel that does not have any in house production, is how the Comedy Department is affected by the wealth of imported comedy being scheduled: what concerns are there that audiences perceive imported comedy to be Channel 4 Comedy output, when it operates entirely independently from the Comedy Department? If these departments are distinct in their operation and their fulfilment of the broadcaster's remit, what impact does the blurring of these departmental categories potentially have on the construction of what comedy at Channel 4 means? This comparison of discourses within the participants' interviews will contribute to the overall understanding of these various comedy commissioning methods and their impact on the cultural value placed on creative labour.

### **Calling Content “Comedy”: Problematising Genre Theory Research on Television Comedy**

At the time of writing, there are several ways in which the 4od web site organises Channel 4's programming. There are categories that are familiar to traditional textual television genre theory, such as comedy, documentary, drama and entertainment. There is also the addition of those that are implicitly valuable enough to the broadcaster's remit and creative identity to include: history, food and audio described. Within these categories users can further elect to be shown programmes alphabetically, by what is most popular or by what has become most recently available. Users can also arrange 4od's content in its entirety by these last three methods of organisation. But despite these specific categories, it is common on the site for programmes to appear in more than one section. There are also some kinds of programming, such as those brought in to the schedule by the Acquisitions department, that are absorbed entirely into these six generic categories.

What Channel 4 states is 'comedy' through this online organisation of content is very different to how the institution itself distributes the creative work into departmental categories and, as this section will show, this distribution of labour has connotations for how that creative work is framed in terms of discourses of cultural value.

Given that there are conflicts around how Channel 4 as an institution understands what counts as comedy, I ask how these different types of comedy are constructed in relation to creativity and to the Comedy Department, and what other distinctions of creative value might be made during that process.

I suggest here that generic classification, as a process of exclusion and inclusion, can operate around the distinctions of high culture and low culture that Williams' points to in relation to fears around television as an entire medium. To classify certain processes of production as being 'Comedy' production, is to refer to discourses around what that department does and is assigned to do within Channel 4, and to classify Entertainment shows elsewhere is to construct the notion that that programme format ascribes to the characterisation of what that department does. It is by approaching genre as a cultural process where we can further unpack the hierarchies that constitute how broadcasters construct creativity in relation to a generic category such as "comedy". And it is in this sense that this chapter examines "comedy" as a term that describes an institutional concept rather than a set of textual generic conventions.

### **Studying Sitcom: Genre Form as Cultural Value**

For Brett Mills, "comic impetus" is a phenomenon that can be perceived within the comedy text that distinguishes a programme's overriding ascriptions to humour: "while [sitcoms] may also aim to fulfil other purposes such as informing audiences, they demonstrate a comic impetus which results in the adoption of sitcom characteristics" (Mills, 2009: 06).

For Neale and Krutnik, "Comedy is itself a varied phenomenon, both in the range of forms it encompasses – from the joke to the sit-com – and in the range of defining conventions it can involve: from the generation of laughter, to the presence of a happy ending, to the representation of everyday life" (1990: 1). They characterise comedy as varied in its potential forms and as a moveable quality that can exist in other generic categories without interrupting their generic status.

There are ways in which these different definitions of "comedy" relate specifically to a notional spectrum of quality and triviality and as such cultural value. Neale and Krutnik note

that the sitcom is understood as a category not only through the formal properties associated with its half hour television format, but with connotations of triviality because of the conventions of domestic and family sitcoms (236). They note that writer and producer of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970-1977) James L. Brooks objected to the show being referred to as sitcom because of his understanding of it as a pejorative term, lacking in cultural value: “When somebody called *Mary* a sitcom, we’d be furious. We weren’t doing sitcom. We were doing character comedy” (236). So we can see here how even within the genre of comedy, there are subsections, formats and methods of generating distinctions that use discourses of quality and creative value to determine their legitimacy.

While this is quite different to the distinctions that I will show in how the Comedy and Entertainment Departments apply discourses of quality to their respective formats, it is through the operative code of ‘quality’ that these distinctions will be understood. Within the specific context of Channel 4, as a public service broadcaster, which is not for profit but is funded by advertising sales, this section will look at how Comedy bears claims to quality while Entertainment is understood through notions of commerciality and “least objective programming” (Nelson, 2007: 3).

The discourses underpinning the ways in which the work of Channel 4's Comedy Department is constructed by its commissioners are those that pertain to traditions of artisanal creativity, authorship and high cultural value. Such a construct relates emphatically to debates around *quality television* as a distinct and new media phenomenon that moves television past its low cultural status and suggests the kind of hierarchy that Frith describes: a perceivable cultural superiority and inferiority within popular culture.

Robin Nelson's analysis of contemporary, high-end drama characterises ‘quality television’ as that which is afforded big budgets, exhibits high production values and enjoys prime time slots on major channels (2007: 3). As an opposition to this construct of quality television, he references the idea of “least objectionable programming”, a term first used by NBC executive Paul L. Klein to describe the notion that when television shows gain high ratings it is not because all of these viewers really enjoy a show, it is because the show is inoffensive and doesn't cause audiences to switch channel for something less challenging; viewers “[settle] not on what they liked but on what they least disliked” (Thompson, 1996: 39). Thompson recounts a history whereby NBC as a network had attempted to stay buoyant with this attitude towards making television. This was ultimately unsuccessful, particularly when the introduction of cable television “shattered the mass audience into many pieces” (41). The

shift that NBC makes, according to this history, is into quality television, the description of which might well be found in Channel 4's public service remit. Quality television is beset with divisiveness and it "goes against the grain" (42); it is television "not for the entire mass audience but for specialized segments of that audience" (39); like Channel 4 Comedy, quality television allows for the "slow starting series" (44) and emerges from giving "writers and producers more leeway to pursue a vision" (44).

Comedy, then, is constructed by those working at Channel 4 in the same ways as quality is characterised in this rhetoric around contemporary drama. If the work of the Comedy Department pertains to this notion of quality, which itself relies on historical discourses around creativity, then what of the work of the departments that make 'not-quality' comedy? As such, this is a genre study that questions the sites of generic classification and broadens the process of classification to include distinctions of value as well as formal qualities.

### **Creating Comedy: Post-structural Television Genre Theory**

Cultural studies, for many decades now, has argued that it is now insufficient for the analyst to look only at the cultural text to define how that text might operate in or impact upon society; while there might be recurring structural elements argued to indicate a generic classification, cultural theory has looked elsewhere to the industrial or institutional practices in the production of cultural phenomena and to the ways in which audiences interact with or construct those texts. This is not to say that one method of analysis is necessarily more accurate than another, but that analyses are complicated by one another and a fuller understanding of cultural processes will be limited by a text only structuralist approach. For a study of 'comedy', which positions the climate of Channel 4 within a specific time frame, a post-structuralist approach has pertinence for the address of genre, echoing the observations of Edgerton and Rose:

"No longer is genre being viewed as a fixed entity where programmes are being evaluated either deductively against some ideal conception of what a particular genre should be, or inductively alongside an ever widening collection of similarly structured texts" (2009: 7).

Instead this is a genre study that sees “genre as a process rather than a static category” (*Ibid*). Within what Channel 4 categorises as ‘comedy’ in its online external material, I wish to examine where and how cultural distinctions are constructed through the process of inclusion and exclusion in the departmental categorisation of genres, and question where else Channel 4 might blur these distinctions. In doing so this chapter seeks to contribute to the broadening of genre theory by analysing not how the television text might warrant the definition of comedy, but instead look at where these definitions are constructed institutionally. By shifting genre theory from a method of structural analysis to a poststructuralist perspective of analysing genre as a cultural process, this study will further the argument for looking not only at text, but also at institutional practices to understand how genre is created in different and sometimes contradictory ways.

In this section introduces a three tiered unpacking of discourses around cultural value: first the discourses that construct the medium of television as low culture, then the legislative discourse that positions the genre of comedy as lower in cultural value within such a public service broadcaster, and finally understanding how within the genre of comedy further processes of generic classification, the inclusion and exclusion of certain television formats in the Comedy Department, construct hierarchical distinctions of greater or lesser cultural value through the process of institutional classification. By examining distinctions at this level we can see where creativity, and associated elements of the creative remit of Channel 4, are included and excluded. This

analysis, then, will use a cultural theory approach to genre in order to examine the discursive construction of comedy in relation to creativity, and vice versa, within Channel 4 and finally offer examples of the practical implications of such discursive productions of cultural value.

Returning to Simon Frith’s work, which acknowledges distinctions of value within popular cultures, this section will look at how genre itself, as a framework bound by the processes of inclusion and exclusion, delineates cultural value within these processes as a construct of worth within creative a creative institution. That is, while there are a number of programme formats that are called “comedy” by Channel 4, for instance on the online streaming web site 4oD, the ways in which Channel 4 personnel construct creative processes of developing and producing programmes within the Comedy Department itself, rely on discourses of authorship, quality and public service. This differs from where some of these “comedy” programmes are commissioned elsewhere, where the construction of programming in the Acquisitions and Entertainment Departments is constructed very differently in terms in

relation to discourses of creativity and cultural value. As this analysis will highlight, these departmental definitions therefore affect not only the structural distribution of creative labour in comedy but the extent to which different generic classifications pertain to claims to cultural and creative value.

While first section examined how discourses around comedy and creativity manifest within the parameters of Channel 4, this section aims to make sense of the ways in which those working in the Comedy Department, commissioning “comedy” programmes, speak to their responsibility to fulfil the remit of Channel 4 as described in the first section of this thesis.

However, while this is a work on the construction of a cultural form through industrial and institutional discourses and practices, this is also an address of a cultural form that has in existing literature been understood as a genre and, as such, it is important to show where this study intercepts the body of research on genre theory. That is, by looking at the departmental distinctions about what “comic” programming is commissioned and developed by the Comedy Department, which provides a clear starting point as to what counts as “Channel 4 Comedy”, we can look at the discourses that underpin such distinctions as a way of developing debates around genre beyond the generic text itself.

As I will explore below, existing literature on television comedy is so often introduced with exceptions and elements that problematise the naming or definition of television formats or specific programmes as “Comedy” that genre theory has to move beyond such textual analyses. The concerns with where these definitions might be problematic within such textual analyses has been flagged up in studies of both television and film comedy (Horton, 1991; Moreale, 2003; Creeber, 2008; Mills, 2005; 2009). With these acknowledgements in mind, this section argues that genre, as it is constructed within institutions that produce such texts, is a vital site for showing where these contradictions might arise in the reception of television comedy programmes. It will inform understandings of where “quality” lies in comedy programme formats, and where it does not, and point to how this impacts on the discursive construction of “Comedy” depending on the distribution of labour within Channel 4's commissioning structure. In doing so, this study also points to contradictions within what is made by the Comedy Department, and what audiences perceive as Comedy Television at on Channel 4 and its portfolio of channels. This study, then, moves beyond the acceptance that genre can be diagnosed by perceivable textual components, as assessed by academic experts, and wishes to engage with these contradictions to further the scope of how we understand how genre, as a process, operates.

As argued by Edgarten and Rose, the textual analysis of such components, emphasised in what they call the “classical stage” of analysing genre, “remained mainly on textual matters, such as setting, plot structure, characterisation, iconography, theme, technique and style” (2005: 4). In this sense, existing studies of television comedy may have “focused on text rather than context” (Ibid). In research on both film and television genre, the comedy text has been foregrounded as a grounds for analysing patterns and conventions in screen media that makes people laugh. It is the restrictions of addressing genre solely from such approaches that this study seeks to depart and recommend for further study of comedy and other television genres. By exploring the conventions through which television comedies, and particularly sitcoms, have been understood in existing literature, we can move beyond trying to state 'what comedy is' and examine, through discourse analysis, 'what saying what comedy is, means'.

As a discourse analysis that examines how such distinctions impact on notions of what is “quality” and what isn’t, and how this has further implications for how comedy as a genre is understood at Channel 4, a research method of accessing genre analysis from a position outside of the generic text must be established.

### **Conventions of Studying Television Comedy and Genre**

The focus of studying television comedy as a genre has been beset with an emphasis on sitcom. Brett Mills introduces the study of television comedy in *The Television Genre Book* noting that research on the genre has been “categorised by fits and starts, exploring a diverse range of concerns” but in the next sentence noting that this lack of sustained focus is surprising because of “sitcom’s dominance of America’s prime time television...as well as the genre’s central family entertainment status in Britain and America” (Mills, in Creeber, 2008: 74). Mills elaborates on the complicated forms of television comedy and appearances of comedy on television in a way which points to the questions around genre, as a process of distinction, that this study wishes to explore: “sitcom, sketch shows, stand up, advertising and animation, as well as...in other genres such as drama, news, chat shows and so on” (74). Mills makes the point that the inclusion of comedy in such a variety of television programming might be a key reason as to why comedy may have escaped such sustained

academic attention and that the focus on sitcom as television comedy has further narrowed the academic field on broadcast comedy.

While the literature on the television comedy genre may be so far under developed, as is suggested above, there are studies from a variety of methodologies on the genre.

Mills' *Television Sitcom* (2005) also questions textual definitions of the sitcom form: "defining exactly what it is that makes the sitcom a discrete genre which is usually understood by both industry and audiences is difficult, particularly as there is much disagreement over exactly which programmes are sitcoms and which aren't" (23). Mills points to the complicated generic classifications of what is said to be "comedy drama" and what distinctions might be made between "sitcom" and "sketch shows", also noting that there is "flexibility not only within the industrial structures which produce sitcom, but also within audiences' reading techniques" (*Ibid*).

But what is still missing from this flexibility in genre definition is the industrial process, prior to the text's production, and how discourses at this site might ultimately impact on broader understandings, and indeed misunderstandings of the genre.

While television comedy theory might support the thinking around where the television comedy text sits as a creative or cultural form, or point to assumptions about its ability to be a serious form of entertainment, this chapter holds wider implications in terms of how generic classification represents the cultural processes of defining and distinguishing between performances and productions of comedy. Within a discourse analysis such as this, one concerned with the production and reproduction of cultural value in television production and organisation, there must be a departure from genre theory that is preoccupied with the deconstruction of the comedy text, and look to literature that "avoids the tendency toward generalization [sic] and abstraction that typifies some genre theory" (Mittel, 2001: 4). For Jason Mittel, it is possible and indeed necessary that we question the extent to which genre is "an appropriate unit for analysing television content" through broader discursive analyses of "how genres themselves operate as categories" (*Ibid*). We can approach this as cultural theorists by positioning genres not as inherently textual components (6), but as dependent on intertextuality and as such "foreground questions of cultural process in our attempts to analyse media genres" (10).

In this sense this is also a Deridian analytical perspective, where the cultural studies approach to genre is underpinned by the calling into account of the boundaries of generic naming, as

well as Derrida's wider opposition to the presumptions of structuralist textual analysis. He states in *The Law of Genre*, that “[a]s soon as the word 'genre' is sounded as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it a limit is drawn” (Derrida, 1980: 203). This is a study of where those limits are drawn around television comedy commissioning at Channel 4 to “textually harass” the meaning of these different forms of categorisation, to highlight their “disunity which underlies [their] apparent unity” and look at the ways in which they are used to construct and measure discourses of cultural value (Barry: 2002: 72).

### **Small ‘c’ Comedy: Entertainment Writing as Contributory**

While there is a clear definition of what counts as “scripted” programming and therefore that which is categorised as Comedy for those working at Channel 4, Head of Entertainment Justin Gorman observes that there are still processes of scripting the Entertainment shows that don't fall under this institutional definition of Comedy. In the interview, he talks about the ways in which the Entertainment Department is tied to its large budgets and lack of public service in comparison to other departments, but quickly looks to also highlight the extent to which his slate is still scripted.

“The slate we have is a massive mixture, so I have to look after Derren Brown and obviously that is scripted. We even have writers from *Dr Who* [BBC One, 1963 - ] or whatever helping construct those stories. So that's one process. And then you've got *8 Out of 10 Cats* [Channel 4, 2005 -], slash [*8 Out of 10 Cats*] Does *Countdown* [Channel 4, 2012 -]. Still heavily scripted but with a bit of a game show in there, and then you've got kind of in the middle, *10 O'Clock Live* [Channel 4, 2011-2013], *Million Pound Drop* [Channel 4, 2010 -]...our slate is the most diverse of the channel. So for all the things that make it quite weird and by itself it's also probably the broadest? Which means we can often end up doing bits of scripted or totally not scripted or indeed just stand up”.

There is an understanding here that Entertainment at Channel 4 is thought of by those outside of the department as essentially unscripted television, but for Justin Gorman this is a misunderstanding about the department's creative processes. So in terms of Gorman's construction of what Entertainment is as a genre the term “scripted” is used to compare the

Department to other genres that, as he later describes, have a greater claim to the broadcaster's public service – to be a department that produces “scripted” material is one that has greater creative legitimacy than those that don't and using the term “scripted” can justify a creative process if its purpose in the context of a public service broadcaster is called into question.

In this sense, to be a department that uses “scripted” material is to be one that is creative and culturally valuable. This reflects the literature that describes discourses around cultural hierarchies. Walter Benjamin's influential writing around the mechanisation of culture, whereby the value of culture is measured by the perception of an author rather than a mechanical production or reproduction of a product or commodity is relevant here. There is a sense with Comedy that the processes of production are highly collaborative, but there is also an emphasis on the writers as those who drive the vision or the voice of the whole programme; it is this voice that informs the creative denotation of “authorship”. The distinction that Gorman makes is that the writers for Entertainment are contributors, not the definitive visionaries of the programmes for which they write. The discourse here is that cultural value can be identified by a perceivable individual creative voice and that this lies in a specific notion around scriptwriting that takes place in Comedy at Channel 4 but not in Entertainment. In this sense then, Comedy is constructed as more creative than Entertainment.

While there are clearly writing processes and the creation of set speech for performance on camera in all of the programme types that Gorman mentions, the distinction is made between what is written or even is partly scripted and what is to be “scripted” programming means. “[T]he main point of difference is that we don't have one singular writer or writers, like Sam [Bain] and Jesse [Armstrong] doing *Peep Show*, behind what we do”. So it is because these writing processes for Entertainment programmes don't have the same claims to authorship or a writers' voice that makes them distinct and less worthy of the “scripted” title. The sense of authorship described of Bain and Armstrong here is so central to the distinction between Comedy and Entertainment and Gorman states that it is the “main point of difference” between the work in the two departments.

#### Channel 4 Entertainment and Tone: Broadness, Warmth and not being “Mean”

For Gorman and Commissioning Editor Tom Beck, the content commissioned and managed by the Entertainment Department must be broad in tone, because their responsibility is to attract big ratings and create desirable formats to market to other broadcasters internationally. This reach, defined in terms of sales, will be pointed to below in relation to Channel 4's remit. Gorman describes *Million Pound Drop* (Channel 4, 2010 -) in these terms: “[it's] in over forty territories so it makes enormous amounts of cash”.

Gorman talks about making a conscious effort to change what Comedy and Entertainment were doing at Channel 4 before he came to run Entertainment: “we're much warmer than three or four years ago. That was a decision I made that we didn't want to make nasty telly anymore”. So here, the Entertainment Department's ascription now to broadness is oppositional to the alternative of *nastiness*. Beck speaks very similarly about the change in tone: “we're a slightly broader, warmer place than we were even two years ago, even when I was working on programmes for Channel 4 four or five years ago. We're not quite as...I wouldn't say 'mean' but harsh as we used to be”. Again, broadness is oppositional to *meanness* and *harshness*: while broadness and high ratings might be oppositional to niche authored programmes with small but passionate audiences, it instead is offensive programming that fails to fulfil the responsibility of Channel 4's Entertainment commissioning. The method of broadness is more attuned to the “least objectionable programming” characterisation discussed above and the avoidance of cultural discount.

When asked if he could elaborate on this change in tone Beck refers to hidden camera show *Balls of Steel* (Channel 4, 2005 – 2008): “there was this character called Annoying Devil who used to run around fucking people off. Sometimes it's funny and sometimes it's a bit crude”. He also talks about the *Friday Night Project* (Channel 4, 2005-2009): “it could only sit at Friday night on Channel 4 because a lot of the jokes were quite crude”. He uses the term “mean spirited” and accuses some of these shows of making victims out of members of the public that featured.

There is an opposition here, then, between the older, harsher Entertainment programmes when they were attached to Comedy commissioning, and the new, warmer and broader Entertainment programmes from the autonomous Entertainment commissioning system. If the new Entertainment programmes do serve this function of being less confrontational,

being warmer and more appealing to more people, then there is an opposition between this and the appeal of Comedy: Comedy continues to speak with a highly authored, writer's voice to a small, specific audience, whereas Entertainment now is a collaborative production process, with personality-led content that speaks to a broad audience and garners high ratings. So for Comedy, low audiences mean alternative, niche, authored content, but for Entertainment there is no public service recompense for low advertising sales.

The characterisation of these departments and genres reflect the pivotal diametric opposition of cultural value and commercial enterprise. I argue that these two genres are constructed using the same distinction within the context of Channel 4's remit and funding structure. Entertainment is associated with commercial goals, through its broad appeal and large profit margin, and Comedy is culturally valuable and therefore must be supported by the channel despite its financial losses.

The Culture Industry, as imagined by Adorno and Horkheimer, would have all television as a minority-run, mass distributed and certainly damaging popular medium and under such positioning neither television Comedy nor Entertainment could be of social, cultural or creative value. Here, the loss of artistic value in the cultural artefact is directly associated with economic motivation at the site of production: "movies and radio no longer have to pretend to be art...they call themselves industries; and when their directors' incomes are published, any doubt about the social utility of the finished products is removed" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972: 121).

Again, while this would condemn all forms of television as part of the Culture Industry, more usefully for this analysis we can look further into the discourse within this Neo-Marxist theory of cultural production and financial preoccupation; by examining the talk within the television industry, we can look to where the ways that the participants talk about Comedy and Entertainment, as both departments and genres, reconstruct this diametrical opposition of cultural value and commercialism

If Comedy represents the fulfilment of Channel 4's public service remit, its "social utility", whereas Entertainment supports its funding structure through reaching large audiences and selling formats to other producers, there is a sense that these conflicting departmental responsibilities can co-exist. Implicitly, it is because of the fulfilment of the remit that Entertainment can exist and it is because of the income generated by Entertainment programmes that the production of Comedy can be subsidised. In this sense, though a Frankfurtian criticism of the creative value of Entertainment might consider its lesser claims

to the specific remit of Channel 4's social and cultural purpose, and accept that commercialism and cultural value are oppositional characteristics, the co-existence of these departments within the same broadcaster offers a way through which cultural phenomena might occupy a space of both commercial sustainability and public service. Ultimately, we can see how the characterisation and discursive construction of these two genres is used to delineate the commercial versus cultural dichotomy.

### **“An Odd Beast”: Entertainment and Channel 4’s Public Service Remit**

When asked about the distinctions between what programmes are handled by the Comedy and Entertainment Departments, Justin Gorman talked first about these departments in the broader context of Channel 4's remit, and the difficulty with balancing that remit as a self-funded organisation:

“Entertainment is a slightly odd beast in the context of the channel because obviously we're a very strange business...we're a public service and we're commercial and we fund ourselves but we're not for profit...and with Entertainment in that context we don't necessarily have a public service like most of the other departments”.

Not only is the Entertainment Department different from Comedy within the institutional requirements, but it's also unique in the context of all of the other departmental categories in that it is not required to fulfil the remit of Channel 4 in the same way. Gorman states that there's no justification for the department's programming if a programme fails to reach high audiences: “there's nothing to say! It's basically just that the numbers didn't stack up and the overnights were bad, so it's quite scary because of that”. A failure for a programme commissioned and developed by the Entertainment Department is measured as such if it doesn't rate highly – it isn't watched by a massive enough audience. This is directly oppositional to Evans' statements that Comedy can be justified by its innovation and its creative voice, when it doesn't reach large audiences. Gorman also puts this in stark contrast with what he calls “actual” Comedy:

“actual comedy, you are probably backing new writers, talent and I think sometimes especially on Channel 4, if only 800, 000 people watch a piece of comedy, like *Toast of London*, if it's really cool, it sort of wins”.

So Comedy can be defended if it fails to gain a large audience if it shows creative development and a sense of being “cool”. An Entertainment programme with low audience figures cannot be defended as “cool” because this is not what is required of the Entertainment Department – its role is to gather high ratings, not to revel in its niche-ness.

The difficulty for Gorman and what makes commissioning Entertainment scary, is the lack of any claim to public service. Public service is what justifies poor ratings and low return on Comedy, but isn't applicable to the Entertainment output:

“Because [Entertainment is] very expensive and it's out there and it's in the peak schedule and it costs so much money, when it fails it's just a big failure...when we commission we spend a lot of money, and when it goes wrong it goes wrong, really badly”.

To go wrong in Entertainment is to lose money – failure for Channel 4 Entertainment is not creative failure. But as Commissioning Editor for Entertainment Tom Beck states, it is because the Entertainment Department exists in the form that it does that other parts of Channel 4's public service can continue to be made in the model that it does:

“[Channel 4 is] under a bit more pressure, more than almost any other I think in terms of balance...between our remit to be creative and different and the fact that we operate as a business. And have to deliver a certain audience share, a certain number of viewers in order to fulfil our other part of our remit”.

In terms of the balance between Channel 4 as both a commercial and public service broadcaster, then, there are justifiable arguments to be made that a significant part of their programming is not fulfilling, and not intended to fulfil, the institution's responsibility to commission and broadcast a variety of perception challenging and innovative programmes for audiences un-catered for elsewhere in British broadcasting. However, as Beck describes, this is only one side of the remit. The other side, implicitly, is that it must appeal to enough people to firstly justify itself as a major broadcasting brand and also to attract a wide enough viewership, at least some of the time, to continue making loss making programmes elsewhere. For Comedy, specifically, although this dynamic is described as functioning more broadly, while there might be a problem for Comedy with a capital 'C' being marginalised by

Entertainment or Acquisitions comedy, it is only because these cheaper and wider reaching programmes are scheduled, that the Comedy Department can continue to make sitcoms and sketch shows.

## Section Three: The Individual

### Creative Practice and 'Making Funny Stuff'

This section's interviews are with creative practitioners in Channel 4 Comedy and it is again through a method of applied thematic analysis that this section will conclude this thesis' broader understanding of how constructions of creativity and comedy operate discursively with a top down three tiered approach. Within the context of research around creative and cultural labour and the creative industries, and what Hesmondhalgh and Baker call a lack of specificity around how such categories are defined, this section seeks to conclude this thesis' account of how creative practice and creative labour are defined in a sense by these practitioners' talk around their work lives and careers within this particular corner of the television industry (2009: 99).

I use the term "creative practitioners" tentatively as the distinction of the roles in question - writer, script editor and performer - as 'creative' potentially reconstructs the notion observed in the previous section that those working for the channel as commissioners or running departments are not performing creative roles. Nevertheless, with this awareness in mind, this micro level of Comedy work is the final site for where this study attends to discourses around creative processes and cultural value and as such is the final distillation of how the broader industrial and institutional discourses manifest within processes of production. It is through the analysis of these creative workers' talk around their career progression, their creative practice and their relationship to those at commissioning level, that I unpick the generalisation that Comedy work at production level is a type of work that is fallen into and look more closely at what industrial conditions make space for creative individuals. In turn, this section looks at where these conditions implicitly hinder the inclusion of creative workers from a broader range of backgrounds and the implications for encouraging the notion that Comedy work is accessible when Channel 4's remit is so dependent on the development of new and diverse creative talent.

The interviews in this section are with four individuals each at differing levels of experience, engaged in different creative roles and who have produced content not only for Channel 4,

but with the BBC, ITV and Sky. Writer Sam Bain's most high profile credits are for creating, writing and executive producing *Peep Show* (Channel 4, 2003 -), Channel 4's longest running sitcom at the time of writing, and more recently *Fresh Meat* (Channel 4, 2011 -) a drama commission that appears prominently under the 'comedy' category of the 4od web site which Bain describes as a "comedy drama". His additional content credits include Comedy commission *Smack the Pony* (Channel 4, 1999 – 2003), *The Thick of It* (BBC Four, 2005 – 2007; BBC Two 2009 – 2012) and *Screenwipe* (BBC Four, 2006 - 2008) as well as his primary writing credits for feature film *The Magicians* (O'Connor, 2007), BBC Two's *That Mitchell and Webb Look* (BBC Two, 2006-2010) and *The Old Guys* (BBC One, 2009-2010).

Andrew Ellard is a script editor and writer, who has worked across British broadcasters for programmes including Channel 4 Comedies *The IT Crowd* (Channel 4, 2006-13), *The Midnight Beast* (E4, 2012 - ) *Cardinal Burns* (Channel 4, 2014 - ) *The Life of Riley* (BBC One, 2009 – 11), *Vic and Bob's House of Fools* (BBC Two, 2014 - ) and *Red Dwarf* (BBC Two, 1988- 99; Dave, 2009 – 2012).

Paul Doolan describes himself as a "young writer" in terms of his television comedy career. He started out as a runner at TalkBack Productions, where he submitted sketches to *Man Stroke Woman* (BBC Three, 2005-2007). He therefore has experience working as part of a production team as well as with writing. He's credited as a main writer for *Man Stroke Woman* as well as *Anna and Katy* (Channel 4, 2013) and has written episodes and contributed to *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* (BBC, 1996 - ), *Clone* (BBC Three, 2007), *The Armstrong and Miller Show* (BBC One, 2007 - ), *Mongrels* (BBC Three, 2010 - 2011) and *Cardinal Burns* (E4, 2012; Channel 4, 2014). He is credited with writing and also creating Sky sitcom *Trollied* (Sky, 2011 – 2014).

David Mitchell is a writer and performer of television and radio comedy who, at the time of writing, stars in *Peep Show* with comedy partner Robert Webb, with whom he writes and stars in BBC sketch show *That Mitchell and Webb Look*. Mitchell wrote and performed for Channel 4's *10 O'Clock Live* (Channel 4, 2011 – 2013) as well as *David Mitchell's Soapbox*, an online and DVD series distributed in part by *The Guardian* newspaper. His other writing credits include *The Armstrong and Miller Show*, *Bruiser* (BBC Two, 2000) and *Big Train* (BBC Two, 1998 – 2002), and he is credited elsewhere for acting on *Jam and Jerusalem* (BBC One, 2006 - 2009), *The Ambassadors* (BBC Two, 2013), *The Bleak Old Shop of Stuff* (BBC Two, 2011 - 2012) and *The Magicians*. As well as hosting panel show *Was It Something I Said?* (Channel

4, 2013) Mitchell appears regularly on a number of comedy panel shows across British broadcasters.

While the evidence presented in this chapter will reference Channel 4 programmes for the main, the environment of the British television Comedy industry, as a cottage industry (Mills, 2009: 1) means that the participants of this section can be identified less as Channel 4 Comedy workers and more Comedy workers in general. Each of the participants has worked with different broadcasters so if they do not name a particular programme it is not perceivable that they're referring to Channel 4 specifically. Instead, this analysis looks at how the talk about factors such as money, time, audience perception, development and interference reflects hindrance to creative work that would be problematic for Channel 4's specific remit to commission and broadcast innovative and progressive Comedy. There are also discrepancies between these different creative roles and their sense of being associated with a channel on any given project. David Mitchell states that there is more involvement with executives at Channel 4 than other British broadcasters: "With Channel 4 in general you get a lot more contact with the broadcaster than you do with the BBC, probably largely because they make fewer comedies so they can be more hands on." But Andrew Ellard makes it clear and given the context of the interview even says apologetically: "This is going to be incredibly frustrating for what you're doing but that's the peculiar thing of it...I've done Channel 4 a few times now and they've all been completely different experiences because who I work with isn't the channel".

The question for this chapter then, is not a comparative one of whether Channel 4 is necessarily a broadcaster where Comedy workers feel more or less creative than at other institutions, but how their experiences of being television Comedy workers relates to those discourses of cultural value present in the talk of Channel 4 workers in the previous section and in light of how they construct their roles within the industry and their creative processes.

There is existing research on trends in cultural work across industries; Mark Banks' *The Politics of Cultural Work* (2007) explores the ways in which creative roles within industries of cultural production are often rendered invisible, using case studies to examine where creative workers reproduce these industrial conditions and where capitalist frameworks disadvantage creative work particularly for women, but ultimately argues that it is possible for cultural work to operate in a beneficial way for both the creative labourer and the organisation within a capitalist economic structure.

Hesmondhalgh and Baker give more specified attention in to the conditions of particular industries in *Creative Work and Emotional Labour in the Television Industry* (2009) and *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries* (2011). The former observes, through interviews, the specific ways in which cultural work in the instance of producing a television talent show contributes to the precariousness of how creative work is elsewhere described more generally. *Creative Labour* looks at the film, magazine journalism and music industries to explore the nature of work within these media fields, those jobs that are deemed most desirable within them and the extent to which the criteria they use to define 'good and bad' work are apparent.

In order to contribute to this research and the burgeoning academic concern with creative work more broadly, this section seeks to unpick the ways in which creative work is constructed not just within the television industry, but within a category of work defined by genre; the question with which this section is presented is how the construction of Comedy as a genre itself informs the distribution of creative agency amongst the production of British television Comedy at Channel 4 and where this conflicts with broader constructions of fears and social purpose with regards to television as a medium.

Do these creative practitioners construct the experiences of making Comedy in similar ways to those at commissioning level? In what ways do they characterise the vital role of Comedy writer and the authorship that is used to describe successful Comedy programmes? How do these workers talk about what makes a project more or less successful? How do notions of the creative value of different kinds of comedy programming reconstruct cultural distinctions of value between broader differences in style, format and production processes? And how is this all affected by the parameters of what might be described as innovative Comedy now, and in the context of the digitalisation of television content?

This analysis begins with talk around writing and authorship, the accidental routes of becoming a Comedy worker, collaboration, channel involvement and the disparity between the understanding of Comedy work and the Comedy text at the departmental and the production level. The contribution here will be to understanding how the value of creative work in Comedy is distributed not only by departmental distinctions, as section two examined, but by conflicting discourses around the artistic, creative individual and the low culture status of both television as a medium and Comedy as a genre. As such I attend to Hesmondhalgh and Baker's assertion that creative power and prestige are "of course

distributed very unequally, both between different media organisations, and between different creative workers within the same media organisation" (2013: 102).

Further to this, this section examines where more detail about how best to create Comedy, how to enter the industry and what it means to be a creative Comedy worker is included in the participants' talk. It does so to contribute more intimate understanding of the television Comedy industry where its creative work is often dismissed as too fun, too accidental and without enough cultural value to be taken seriously.

### **"It Just Came out Funny": Comedy Writers, Authorship and Immaculate Creativity**

As the previous section outlined, there is a great sense in which heads of department and commissioning editors at Channel 4 construct television Comedy as a creative endeavour that is underpinned by the authorship and primary voice of the writers. Elsewhere at Channel 4 in contrast, the work of the Entertainment Department is described as collaborative and much more driven by the programme format and talent on screen than the creative impetus of a script. But the Comedy commissioners' talk around the priority of finding new and progressive Comedy voices operates a rhetoric which, I argue, removes the significance of collaboration in the processes of development and production within the Comedy Department: this 'new voice' refers specifically to writers and as a term describes a singular and definitive creative vision. In this way, the understanding that cultural value is evident in the work of the creative individual is reconstructed in the value judgements through which public service television is itself valued.

Mark Banks states in his analysis of the status of craft work within creative industries, that there is a preoccupation within the study of creative work which privileges "artists, 'creatives' and other extraordinary individuals" (2000: 305). However, I also believe that this privilege is in part reflected and reproduced in the television Comedy industry by the discourses around creative work and how Comedy as a genre is constructed by those working at commissioning level for Channel 4, as seen in the previous section, and by those creative practitioners who create and produce television Comedy.

The ways in which the process of finding new Comedy talent is talked about by commissioners is limited particularly to writers and writer-performers. If the creative vision of the author is to be discovered by commissioners, then there is an inherent-ness implied of the ability to write television Comedy. Such a construction reflects early discourses of creativity, collectively of Plato, Kant and Freud, whereby the creative individual is in some way gifted, exceptional and as such uncommon, or that creativity itself is the product of what Galton calls “hereditary genius” (quoted in Banks, 2007: 81).

The dependency that this mythology of the Comedy creative has on the illusory and invisible, and the discourse of discovering innate talent in the individual, becomes problematic for any sense of accessibility into the British television Comedy industry. Underpinned by the exceptional quality of the creative author, this talk reconstructs the idea that the ability to work creatively in television Comedy, as with other creative processes, is a quality that cannot be taught. I argue that this is counterintuitive to the expansive descriptions of learning processes and collaboration that are celebrated by these creative practitioners, and that the notion that writing Comedy is not a skillset that can be taught actually reproduces barriers to this particular area of creative labour. Furthermore, the reconstruction of this discourse operates through two kinds of rhetoric: one which is dismissive or unengaged with wanting to be a Comedy writer, which speaks to a sense of low cultural value and modesty about the kind of creativity in which these practitioners are engaged; and a second that speaks to the inherent, the un-learnable and the divine that underpinned discourse around creativity in the nineteenth century.

Within the talk from Mitchell, Ellard, Doolan and Bain, these discourses manifest and are reproduced by the accidental and, as they refer to it, “subconscious” understanding they have of how they entered into the industry at the start of their careers. This lack of awareness of their potential Comedy writing talent is expressed through a rhetoric of modesty and self-deprecation whereby they just happen to be funny. In turn, this section examines statements that contradict this natural talent and lack of training, by looking at the ways in which the writing skills and industry knowledge required to express creative vision can be nurtured by Channel 4 Comedy in the fulfilment of its remit. By analysing the participants' talk around their own experiences in the industry I look to where there is a sense that, in fact, a learning process is central to becoming a Comedy writer, to unpick the assumption of there being an unteachable and divine funniness.

This learning process is evident in the talk around how writers and writing interact with roles of script editing and performing, as well as with the input of channel commissioners and executives. The role of writer perhaps stands out as grounds for analysis quite so prominently because each of the participants in this section has experience writing their own sketch or sitcom shows, even if this is not their primary occupation. As analysis will show, it is often through knowing about being a writer of Comedy that they justify the value of their own creative work as well as how they judge the extent to which others in the industry “get” Comedy. The emphasis on writing and the primary voice of the script as central to the knowledge operative process that these participants express, reconstructs having a greater sense of know-how about what makes Comedy successful than the organisational roles of those at the meso commissioning and departmental level.

With the emphasis that commissioners place on the authorship of Comedy writers noted in the previous section, how creative practitioners construct the very idea of being a Comedy writer and how they come to be in the position to establish their own creative voices is significant to the broad question of what hinders and what helps the development of Comedy talent and television Comedy projects.

For writer Sam Bain, writing Comedy was not so much a choice as an instinctive product of his starting out in writing anything:

“The first short story I wrote, which was quite a hard thing to write...it just came out funny, it just came out as comedy, it wasn't planned. I didn't sit down and decide 'I want to write comedy' or 'I'm a funny person, I'm going to write something funny'. It was just what I naturally gravitated towards in the creative process”.

Andrew Ellard states that he never intended to start writing Comedy, despite being a fan of the genre: “I didn't have any notion that comedy was anything. I watched a lot of it but I didn't think it was for me. I was a dramatist”.

He describes, much like Bain, a sense of his first draft of a Comedy show being an accidental happening rather than something he purposefully decided to do. He says of a period of time when he was working on documentaries and interview work for *Red Dwarf* (BBC Two, 1988 – 1999; Dave, 2009, 2012) writers and producers Rob Grant and Doug Naylor:

“Out of nowhere I sort of wrote a sitcom...I took a holiday on the QM2 and sat in the bar there and wrote a pilot out of nowhere. And I thought well maybe this is what I do”.

Paul Doolan's talk around his own intention to become a Comedy writer even suggests that he misremembers his desire and intention to be a comedy writer in order to fit in with this rhetoric of accidentally moving into Comedy:

"I did a night school in script writing when I was fourteen that I'd totally forgotten about. So I must have known then that I wanted to. I used to read a lot of script books and always...encyclopaedically watch comedy, so I guess I must've known".

Despite going on to study creative writing modules at university as well, Doolan upholds the idea that this was not a conscious process of intending to write for television Comedy, going so far as to say that those who do have that intention are over confident in their abilities before they've learnt about what the process actually entails:

"It's one of those jobs where it feels arrogant to admit to it at some point, you can't really go 'oh yeah, I'm gonna be a writer'. It's sort of...well people do, but it's usually people that do that at a young age, it's usually pricks".

Doolan clearly separates himself from those who he derides for purposefully externalising their desire to write for a living. Instead there is a sense of dismissal, reduction and modesty with which Doolan describes his own move into being a Comedy writer, as well as a tentativeness with which he talks about his approach to creative work in general:

"It's probably my own problem rather than theirs, seeing it as a problem when someone says 'I'm going to be an artist'. But it just seems like one of those jobs that people don't have and so it's hard to plan a way into it. I think my subconscious took over trying to do it".

The extent to which these writers construct a sense of precariousness or unexpectedness around getting into Comedy, points to a conflict between regarding oneself as talented or capable as a creative worker and with pursuing the genre itself. Where both Bain and Ellard describe their willingness to aspire to write, the move into Comedy is a product of coming to realise or discovering their own comedy talent and then capitalising on it. They don't talk of aspiring to the work and taking steps to increase their ability and gather the skills required to do it. The ability and drive to write Comedy is constructed here as an almost biologically or psychologically predisposed condition, described by Doolan initially as being taken care of by his subconscious.

However, despite this accidental or subconscious choice to try to write Comedy, Doolan does go on to talk about the obsessive relationship with television Comedy he had before starting

to work in the industry itself. When I ask him why he thinks he did move into Comedy, he registers a level of consciousness about loving television Comedies that he previously glosses over: "...it was always Comedy. I loved watching comedy all the time, so I kind of knew I'd do that".

There is, then, an acknowledgement of wanting to write Comedy specifically, which is initially negated in Doolan's unwillingness to explicitly state that he intended to pursue such a career. Again, this speaks to a modesty about identifying as a creative worker, despite identifying clearly as a fan of the television Comedy text. He talks about the Comedy he'd watched in the 1990s and describes the way in which he watched it as abnormal and obsessive.

"Even now, if there's a really good comedy, I'll get obsessed by it...even stuff that wasn't that good like *Game On. Men Behaving Badly* I really liked and you'd just watch it religiously...you'd talk about it at school all the time...I'd watch episodes of things like either times in a row. Driving brothers and sisters and parents mad".

Ellard also talks about his passion for Comedy, which he says friends noted before he acknowledged it. When he talks about accidentally writing his first sitcom pilot he states: "...everyone said to me, 'well, you go looking for jokes, don't you?'...people were always kind of surprised that I wasn't doing comedy". Again, Ellard describes a kind of obliviousness about his own potential as a creative Comedy worker, even though his friends perceived his interest in jokes socially.

In terms of discourses of creativity, there is the idea in this talk around becoming a Comedy writer that the creative worker is naturally or even biologically predisposed to the creative work they pursue. This initial talk that exhibits such a lack of self-awareness or purposeful pursuit in gaining Comedy work feeds into the discourses around the creative individual as in some sense gifted, as the notion of creative activity itself is constructed as "ethereal and elusive" (Fisher, 2004: 7).

This manifests in different levels of consciousness however. There is a gap here between firstly the awareness these writers have of enjoying Comedy, being able to appreciate the creative product, being passionate about it in a recreational sense, and secondly the consciousness they express about deciding or considering Comedy writing as a job. The fact that Doolan states that "it seems like one of those jobs that no one has" suggests that while the work is desirable, there is little understanding of how to get into such creative work in a practical sense. While there is a casualness with which ending up in Comedy work is talked

about, the out-of-reach way in which it is described also feeds into the “prestige attached to artistry and knowledge” (Fisher, 2004: 102). The “genius myth” that is readable here in this talk, is also bound in a modesty that reflects the dismissive way in which Comedy work is talked about with reference to its ‘fun-ness’. It’s here we see a tension between television Comedy work as having low cultural status in terms of its medium and genre, and the high cultural status of the creative labour of the Comedy writer, in comparison to other kinds of work in television Comedy production.

This discourse, then, impacts on methods of sourcing new talent for British television Comedy, which is a primary concern for Channel 4's remit as a broadcaster. If the discourse around becoming a Comedy writer is one beset with an innate, artistic talent and a phantom creative process 'that just happens', then it is difficult to argue that writing Comedy is something that can be learned. And if, due to existing underrepresentation or socio-economic and cultural inequalities, sections of British society struggle to identify as able in their creative abilities or describe an intent to pursue creative work, as these writers express, then the sense that Comedy writing is not a teachable discipline compounds the difficulty with sourcing talent from new and untapped cultural backgrounds and experiences.

The lack of awareness that the participants express with regards to the Comedy industry being a place where they might pursue work, suggests a lack of transparency and a sense of inaccessibility to British television Comedy work. The debates around the political economy of cultural labour focus often on the impact of unpaid work and internships, the economic pressures on gaining necessary social capital and the notion of self-exploitation (Ancliff, Saundry and Stuart, 2007; Grugalis and Stoyanova, 2012; Siebert and Wilson, 2013). While I argue that these issues are applicable to the British television Comedy industry, as I will note below in relation to learning on the job and training in creative skillsets, there is also an issue with self-identification within the potential creative individual when broader hierarchical structures mediate and construct specific identities as less likely to achieve or less worthy of aspirational status. In this sense, the access to social capital is interrupted before the potential creative worker aspires to gain access to this kind of work. What is specific to Comedy is how this is further compounded by the parallel but conflicting rhetoric around television Comedy production as not hard or ‘real’ creative work, which is reflective of the broader industrial trivialisation of genres associated more with entertainment than with public service fulfilment and societal cultural value (Storey, 2013: 7). As such I argue that this dual discourse, which places creative Comedy work out of reach while also dismissing it as trivial or invisible, hinders the self-identification of potential Comedy workers as able to

embark on a career within this industry, particularly from what Grugalis and Stoyanova refer to as “disadvantaged groups” which includes women, black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) workers and those from working class, low income backgrounds (2012: 1311).

Research into creative individuals’ self-belief that their endeavours will result in innovative contributions or “outcome expectations” (Yuan and Woodman, 2010) indicates that there is a direct correlation between the confidence of the creative worker in their ability and the implementation of their creative work within an organisation. For Markus Baer this is crucial to sourcing the greatest innovative contributions from those already working within organisations: “unless actors are motivated to push for the realisation of their ideas and skilled at developing strong buy-in relationships, creativity is likely to be lost” (2012: 1116).

The twofold ways in which Comedy work is rendered unviable or invisible through discourse for those who have actually gained significant enough work in the industry to qualify for the interviews for this project, suggests that there are greater problems in encouraging creative individuals from a broad range of backgrounds. If “the extent to which [individuals] believe that their innovative efforts will result in certain (desirable) outcomes” benefits their extrinsic likelihood of their work being implemented and the intrinsic quality of the work itself, then the lack of self-identification as a potential Comedy practitioner, through these discourses of Comedy as elusive creative work, will ultimately maintain barriers to creative Comedy work (Baer, 2012: 1106).

While it is difficult to draw such a conclusion with the number of creative practitioners’ interviews that this analysis draws on, it is perhaps reflective of a level of privilege of experience that David Mitchell is the only writer to talk about wanting to make television Comedy, having belief in his ability to do so and connecting that at an early age with an active pursuit of the industry. When I ask why he makes television Comedy he talks about it as a much more conscious choice:

“I think primarily because I grew it up watching it and it was my favourite thing. I thought, as teenager, I thought that would be a brilliant thing to do as a job. And when I went to university and met other people that wanted to do that, it became a realistic aspiration”.

The quickness with which Mitchell describes this process of aspiration to realisation, and the fact that he uses the very term “realistic”, positions his experience with wanting to make television Comedy as quite different to Ellard, Doolan and Bain. The university experience to

which Mitchell refers is one where he joined and became head of Cambridge Footlights, an organisation with a history of nurturing and developing television Comedy writers and performers such as Peter Cook, Eric Idle, Simon Bird, Clive James, Tony Slattery, Hugh Laurie, Sue Perkins, and Richard Ayoade. In this sense, the prestige with which artistry and creative work is revered is a quality that is aspirational to those with an existing sense of entitlement to prestigious, difficult or celebrated work.

The distinction that I'm making between Mitchell's talk and that of Ellard, Doolan and Bain might also be a reflective of his greater experience either within the industry or as onscreen talent with responding to interview questions about his career in Comedy in general. However, the distinction is still there to be made – while Bain similarly came from a privileged background of private schooling and further education, he uses the dismissive rhetoric of spontaneous creativity in his Comedy work in a way that Mitchell does not.

While I argue that the spontaneity and intangibility of the creative impulse that Ellard, Doolan and Bain construct is specific to television Comedy, a simplistic, dismissive modesty is also used to render the practicalities of getting into Comedy work invisible. Comedy work is thus constructed as both aspirational and unreachable.

In the pursuit of diverse new Comedy talent it is problematic when there is such little transparency with which perspective writers, performers and other creative talent might be able to envisage themselves accessing work in this industry. Again, while this is perhaps not a large enough survey to conclude this more decisively, what is evident here is a contrast between the accidental and ephemeral access that Ellard, Bain and Doolan describe and the "realistic aspiration" of making television Comedy that Mitchell remembers of being at university in Cambridge, might point to the idea that Mitchell's experience is the result of the privilege not only of his socio-economic cultural capital, gaining his private education and access to Cambridge University, but the privilege specific to British television Comedy, of having access to the position of Footlights President.

That said, the very presence of these four individuals as television Comedy workers and their willingness to partake in interviews on a project about this industry may point to other cultural privileges as all four fit into the category of white, educated males. While this is not representative of the industry as a whole, it is arguable that it is these positions of privilege and a sense of entitlement to creative work that has facilitated their overcoming of the lack of transparency to the industry that they imply.

These interviews therefore firstly point to hierarchies of socio-economic privileges operating in the access to creative work and suggest that these discourses are reflective of the ways in which discourse reflects the realities of starting out in television Comedy. However, it is also my suggestion that the reconstruction of these discourses within the industry, at an industrial and individual level, reproduces these barriers by resisting the notion that creating television Comedy as a job is both realistic and learnable.

### **Writing Partnerships: Collaborative Authorship**

While the sense of collaboration across different positions in creative work in television Comedy is side-lined in the participants' emphasis on the creative vision of the writer, constructing non-writer roles as facilitators rather than collaborators, the ways in which collaboration in Comedy can be found elsewhere in talk around writers collaborating with one another.

Bain's talk around becoming a writer varies between that which is instinctive and that which is the product of trial and error and gradual improvement. He describes his choice to write Comedy as instinctive, saying of his first short story, "it just came out funny, it wasn't planned". Bain also talks with a similarly ephemeral sense of why he and university friend and since long established writing partner Jesse Armstrong came to collaborate on television Comedy writing:

"Me and Jesse were still friends and sort of decided we'd try writing a sitcom together and we just clicked. I tried collaborating with people, other people, before which hadn't really worked, but with him it just clicked".

The sense that the writing duo 'just clicked' again speaks to an innate creative relationship that cannot have been learned, taught or even predicted. While Bain mentions having collaborated with writing partners at all, there is little sense that this process contributed to his and Armstrong's ultimately successful creative relationship and that the trial and error of writing with other partners might have been a process of developing his own writing skills and the ability to work well with another writer. Instead there is an untenable and

unpredictable way in which these two writers are suited to collaborate – their successful creative relationship cannot be intentionally reproduced.

Bain goes on to talk about how useful it is to collaborate on writing projects and about the history of Comedy double acts on British television, either with on-screen talent performing material they've co-written, or writers creating material for an on-screen double act:

“...there's a long tradition of comedy double acts and writing partnerships...and there's good reason for that. Making someone else laugh is a really quick way to tell if something that you're writing is funny and also, you know, bounce off each other. A lot of our stuff is about a double act or about two characters, *Peep Show* obviously or *The Old Guys*. So there's a natural double act we have in the room that's private, that translates to the page”.

For Bain, having this partner in the room which can be translated to the page, and which can help measure or at least act as a method of reassurance for the extent to which a script is working, is useful because without this collaborative help, writing a sitcom can just be too difficult:

“When you're starting out...people underestimate how hard it is to write a good sitcom. Like, it's really, really hard, so having someone to help is good because if you do it on your own, it's [pause] not impossible, but it's as hard as it gets. So it really helps to have a friend basically”.

So far this analysis has pointed to the idea that those working on Comedy projects who are not writers serve as facilitators of the creative vision rather than collaborators and that this is different to the sense of collaboration talked about in reference to the Entertainment Department. In turn, writers are described in the discourse as collaborators to the production process of Channel 4 Entertainment rather than authors. However, in a departure from the single voiced authorship of Comedy, Bain conversely suggests that a new Comedy writer producing a “good sitcom” alone, without collaboration, seems borderline unachievable. While the collaboration is still talked about from the perspective of writers working with writers, the sense that collaboration, rather than the lone voice of the isolated creative, is what brings about better Comedy projects is foregrounded.

Bain and Armstrong first wrote together on a number of children's programmes, which might arguably be said to contain comic impetus, but aren't categorised by the writer as television Comedy: *The Story of Tracy Beaker* (CBBC, 2002 – 2006), *My Parents are Aliens* (ITV, 1999 -

2006) and *The Queen's Nose* (BBC One, 1995 - 2003). Like the talk around Entertainment programming in the previous section, he talks of working on these “kids' shows” in the role as contributor and it is this “training from working on other people's shows” that allowed Bain and Armstrong to develop their writing skills, experience and relationship. Speaking of *The Queen's Nose* he states: “[y]ou wrote six episodes over three series of that show, that's a whole series of a sitcom, you know?”

So by the time the writing duo came to make their break out success *Peep Show* they already had a sitcom series' worth of broadcasted television to their names. And it is the process of making this much television that Bain describes as his education both in writing and what it is to be a contributor to television more generally:

“That's teaching you more than you ever realise you're learning at that time. And how to structure a script, about how to deliver to deadlines, how to deal with production considerations. We were well trained by that, so when we had our first proper show with *Peep Show*, we knew how it worked and we knew what we were expected to do”.

The training that Bain celebrates here is not that which he gained at university or in writing classes, but working on scripts and learning about making television on the job.

Similarly for Doolan, while he studied script writing in an evening class as a teenager and read a lot of script books, it was working in an American-style writers' room on a sitcom called *Clone* that he refers to as the “learning process”:

“It gave me a sort of 'in' to writing and learning the process which I wouldn't have got any other way...It taught me how to make an episode and plan and bring all the plots together, which I sort of knew before but didn't really know the discipline involved”.

Doolan worked with high profile Comedy workers from Britain and from the United States on *Clone*, including *Friends* writer Adam Chase, *Sex in the City* (HBO, 1998 – 2004) writer Alexa Jung, *Malcolm in the Middle* (Fox, 2000 – 2006) writer Maggie Bandur and Toby Davies who had written for Mitchell and Webb. The process itself, based on the American system of multiple writers working together for long hours in a communal space to produce large volumes of episodes, is notably different to how Doolan constructs the British system: “you've come up with what the episodes sort of roughly are, then you can go off to write your episode”. While Doolan states that he believes the British method works better, he

states that writers' rooms are a useful site for learning the discipline of writing sitcom and about the sitcom script: "I think writing teams are really good for new writers in that you can actually just learn how to do it. The show wasn't well received but it was a fun job writing it".

It is also interesting that while the process didn't produce a sitcom that was well received critically or with audiences, Doolan still notes how useful the process was and how much it allowed him to learn on the job, before going on to write on Sky sitcom *Trollied* (2011 -). In terms of being able to learn, Doolan describes it as a "split down the middle" between being funny and having an innate ability, and learning how to write in a practical sense – the sense that he describes having learned on *Clone*.

"You can take somebody who's not as funny and teach them to structure a script better. For me it's like any job, the more you do it the better you get...the more you can write the things that are out there. I think there's an instinctive thing...but I think you can have that something and still not be able to do it if you don't work hard at learning".

So the Comedy writer is someone who is in possession of an innate funniness or access to knowing "what's funny". But they must also learn the practical skillset of how to structure a script. However, as is described across the interviews, both in this and the previous section of this thesis, this learning process and the development of new writing talent happens in production rather than a classroom.

One of the accessibility issues to working in British television Comedy that might be gleaned from this rhetoric is that the learning process associated with making television Comedy can only be accessed by making television Comedy. For writers in particular, as is the difficulty with accessibility in a number of creative industries, attempting to write on the job has also to be prefaced by working on scripts for sitcoms and sketches that might not lead to further work or may never be developed into a pilot or commissioned to series. If there are processes that have to be learned in order to create Comedy and for someone to 'qualify' as a Comedy writer, then the transparency of access to entry level writing work is crucial to developing new talent. To shroud the access gained by those already in the industry with the impression that creative Comedy talent is purely spontaneous is to maintain the social hierarchies that have denied access to creative work across the creative industries.

### **When a Comedy Doesn't 'Land': What Goes Wrong when it goes Wrong?**

Given that the ability to write television Comedy or “funny stuff” is attributed to an intangible creative talent and that creative success in Comedy comes “out of nowhere”, to what is the failure of a Comedy project attributed? And to what extent do such failures contribute to the invisible learning processes that the discourse of creative exceptionalism evades?

When I ask Sam Bain how often he's been involved in a television Comedy project that has been unsuccessful, he laughs “How long have you got?”. For Bain, as well as writing additional material for other people's programmes, these failed projects were how he became familiar with how to write for television Comedy: “My hard drive is literally full of projects which have never been made. Although, no regrets because that's where you learn your trade – writing stuff”. Bain states that this process of trial and error is common to Comedy writers' career trajectories. Ellard also describes having written a vast number of scripts that have largely been unsuccessful: “I've written hundreds of scripts...and learnt so much through the development process”.

Bain gives some examples of shows that he'd written that had been piloted for Channel 4, as well as other broadcasters, that hadn't gone to series. The reasons given for why they might have failed are less to do with the writing process, the characterisation, the story arc or the writer's involvement in general. Sometimes, as is described by commissioners and heads of department, there are very practical reasons for projects not getting beyond the development stage. *Bad Sugar* (Channel 4, 2012), a comedy drama pilot starring *Peep Show* actress Olivia Coleman, Julia Davis and Sharon Horgan and made by Tiger Aspect Productions for Channel 4 broadcast, also failed to get off the ground. Bain's explanation for this is that while a series was on the cards, the high profile talent were simply too busy to continue making the show: “no one was really to blame”.

Bain and Armstrong's Channel 4 comedy drama series *Fresh Meat* was originally a purely Comedy sitcom that had been written as a series for the BBC. It wasn't picked up by the BBC and was then pitched to ITV2 who also turned it down. When I ask about why it got turned down the reply is short and simple and nothing related to the quality of the show: “I think we pitched it to ITV the week that the global banking crisis happened”. Timing is, as ever, crucial to Comedy.

He continues: "I don't know why ITV turned it down. Grateful that they did to be honest, because it's better for us being on a terrestrial channel". A rejection, then, can ultimately be a positive for a Comedy if it gets picked up elsewhere. Moreover, there is greater gravitas and prestige being at Channel 4 than making programmes for ITV. Nevertheless, there is no engagement with the extent to which the programme might not have been fully formed in terms of its creative identity, its voice or other writing elements of the format.

Bain talks about *One Free Hand* (2010), a pilot pitched to the BBC which featured established Comedy talent both on camera and off. It starred Nina Conti, a British comedian and ventriloquist, was written at a time when Bain and Armstrong were known for their work on *Peep Show* and was directed by British television Comedy writer, performer and director Armando Iannucci, who was at the time known for working on *The Day Today* (1994), *Knowing Me, Knowing You with Alan Partridge* (1994) and *The Armando Iannucci Shows* (2001): "We'd already done *Peep Show*, at this point, obviously Armando's a legend and Nina was seen as hot and Miranda [Hart] – it was a no brainer... We were feeling pretty confident".

This confidence however was misplaced and the show failed to get commissioned: "The BBC just expressed no interest...I've no idea why, maybe you'll be able to tell me when you watch it why it was no good". Unlike the commissioners, there is some initial acceptance that it might've been an issue of the show's quality that lead to its lack of success with channel executives. But rethinking, Bain suggests that actually it was more to do with how they went about developing the pilot.

"We made it and we shot it first without really getting it commissioned, because Armando had a bit of money in his budget...I think one of the things about commissioners, you have to work with them because they have to be emotionally invested in your show. Ideally you want them to say 'I love this show, this is my show, I want this show to be made', because they're the ones that are actually going to sell it to the people who actually green light stuff...The fact that we hadn't included anyone in the process probably made them feel uncommitted or uninterested. So that was an interesting lesson".

According to Bain, without ground floor development and the early involvement of a commissioner there was a lack of emotional investment and commitment to the show. The suggestion here is that, for this pilot, the cast and crew were too well established and so didn't require the development process that familiarises a commissioner with a new project. As such, it is implied, commissioners can fail to perceive quality when they don't have a sense

of intimacy or familiarity with what a show is: without their direct involvement in the shaping of the format commissioners fail ever to gain interest. This need for familiarity, or familiarity, as access to the perception of quality in the Comedy text is similar to the way audiences' initial reactions to new Comedies are described by commissioners and heads of department in section two of this thesis. The need to understand the format of the programme by a process of intimacy and emotional investment is described variously, then, as the primary route to the pleasures of television sitcom and sketch programmes.

In terms of the role of a commissioner specifically, this intermediary role between the channel and the creative practitioners is one evident in a wealth of literature around creativity not only within the creative industries but in the encouragement of creativity across the knowledge economy. For Bilton and Leary, the mediation between what they refer to as "creatives" and "suits" is described as a crucial role for managers within cultural work environments as this distinction between who is creative and who is not "makes for difficult communication between the two camps, sometimes descending into outright hostility" (2002: 55).

For Comedy then, this managerial role is that of the commissioner, as mediator between the channel and those making the programme at production level, the creatives. Bain concludes, at least in this example, that a project which is more likely to be commissioned is one that has a specific backer at the channel involved from the very inception of a programme. For David Mitchell, the commissioner's role as a backer is crucial to a new project's development. He uses as an example Iain Morris, the executive who first commissioned *Peep Show* and who now has had great success writing for Channel 4 sitcom *the Inbetweeners* (E4, 2008-2011), which has at the time of writing been the basis for two feature films. Mitchell states that Morris is an example of someone who really "gets" Comedy.

"The first commissioner is that more crucial role...Our initial commissioning editor was Iain Morris...He's a very funny man in his own right, but he was a great commissioning editor to work with because he really loved the script and the idea and totally got it".

Specifically, Mitchell uses Morris' understanding of the format of *Peep Show* to celebrate his work as a commissioner, but he states that Morris has a broader understanding of Comedy and being funny. It is this comprehension and experience that Mitchell uses to describe the quality of input that Morris was able to contribute. Mitchell states that Morris contributed

new and original ideas to Bain and Armstrong as well as being able to mediate between the creative team and the channel:

“[It was] also very helpful having an articulate advocate for the show at the channel, which you don't always get in television. Sometimes something is commissioned but the person whose put in charge of it isn't sure about it and is trying to drag it away from what it was originally intended to be. And the resultant thing is kind of a mish mash of what the commissioners want and what the creators want and it doesn't please anyone”.

Though Morris is described as having contributed ideas to the show, his strength primarily is having allowed *Peep Show* to be realised as it was originally envisaged by the writers, again pointing to the authorship and primary creative voices of the writers. For Mitchell, Morris was able to contribute effectively and to champion what the show was intended to be to Channel 4 because of his ability to understand Comedy and his agreement with the aims of the project: “with *Peep Show* we had unanimity of mission, Iain totally got the show and loved it and worked very hard for it”.

Morris here is framed in quite a unique way in the talk around commissioners more generally. His usefulness and understanding of Comedy is attributed to his own funniness and Mitchell calls attention specifically to Morris' success with *the Inbetweeners* as means of justifying this understanding of Comedy further. In stark contrast Mitchell talks about what is problematic about other commissioners he has observed in British television Comedy, although doesn't name anyone specifically.

Again, there is a clear understanding that what a show is meant to be is the design of those who originally motivate its creation and this, for Mitchell, should be sustained by whomever works on a project as commissioner, rather than questioned or altered to a different agenda. But where is this line drawn between creative input and encouragement that is granted of Morris and the detracted misunderstanding of Comedy that the majority of commissioners are tarred with in this talk?

### **The Silent Mechanic: The Role of Script Editor in Comedy**

With the focus of Comedy's creative authorship and the emphasis placed on the voice of the script in mind, I look now to the significance or insignificance of the role of script editor within the creative process. This role of script writer is talked about by all four participants and this section will analyse how that role is said to operate in the creative process. This will give a fuller understanding of the collaborative development of quality television comedies, and so complicates the notion that such comedy is driven by the single creative author.

The allocation of the authorship within discourses around television production as a creative process is an area rarely approached in the literature. However, John Caldwell's notes the construction of auteur directors in the American film industry and the authorship of showrunners in the American television industry. The creative individuals in these industries are described as the "social misfit...who creates great art" or the "eclectic, culturally tormented and frequently sleepless lone wolf" (Caldwell, 2008: 203). Caldwell's analysis provides a useful context within which to understand how the collaborative nature of film and television production processes is side-lined in the discourse by this focus on the creative individual. Caldwell gives evidence for how American television producers are constructed as the authors of the creative process. However, while his argument is not underpinned as one about comedy specifically, the talk is exclusively around producers' work within the comedy genre: Bruce Helford of *Roseanne* (ABC, 1987 – 1999), Larry Charles of *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1989 – 1998) and *Mad About You* (NBC, 1992 – 1999), Paul Simms of *The Larry Sanders Show* (HBO, 1992 – 1998) and *NewsRadio* (NBC, 1995 – 1999), Phil Rosenthal of *Everybody Loves Raymond* (CBS, 1996 – 2005), Matt Stone and Trey Parker of *South Park* (Comedy Central Productions, 1997 -) and Mitch Huritz of *Arrested Development* (Fox, 2003 – 2006).

For British television comedy, it is the sense of authorship that is placed on the writers, those who first envisage the format of the show, rather than showrunners, which furthers the discourse of individual creativity. However, the ways in which the role of script editor is constructed, as valuable to the creative process but ultimately side-lined within the industry, is evident of the prioritisation of the comedy writer's creative wroth. I argue here that there are types of creative labour in television Comedy production that broadly remain unexamined and are, within the industry and academic attention, rendered invisible in the discursive prioritisation on Comedy writers.

Mark Banks' argument for greater attention to craft labour describes "craft", as opposed to "creative" labour, not only in specific examples of production, such as woodworking ceramics and embroidery, but as work that contributes "an input of the industrial labour process" (2000: 305). For the Comedy industry this could include the technical roles upon which television production is dependent, or the production companies themselves that organise this labour process. While I do not wish to marginalise these collaborative agents in the production of television Comedy, my attention turns specifically to the active role of script editor, in the creation and improvement of the sitcom or sketch scripts. This is because the definition between the writer, as creative or artist, and the script editor as facilitator with so much less creative agency, is one so laden with the distribution of cultural value through discourse, as my analysis of these interviews show, because the actual processes and input of these two roles are, when both present in the creative process, potentially so similar: the distinction is both representative and reproductive of the specific distribution of creative value within Comedy and reflective of this process of distinction between notions of creation and production in the creative industries more broadly. While I would also seek to champion the technical work as part of the collaborative process of television production, if we are to concern ourselves, as Banks does, with the devaluing of craft or production work in the creative process, I argue that we must also look at how creative agency is withheld from certain roles that bear such similarities to the role of creative, in order to render such distinctions the result of arbitrary applications of cultural value.

In the second section of this study, in their talk about working as commissioners with writers, both Nerys Evans and Shane Allen describe the writing and re-writing of scripts before they are ready to be either piloted or commissioned. However, they do not refer specifically to a script editor being involved in this process, despite the role being crucial to this process. So if this role goes unacknowledged in at the institutional and departmental levels, how is the role of script editor included and understood at a production level and how does Ellard, whose primary occupation in Comedy is as script editor, understand how to make the writer's writing better? To what extent is their role to add more jokes or make the individual programme funnier? And what relationship does the script editor have with their own authorial Comedy writing voice?

The primary difference between the work of the Comedy writer in providing their authorial voice and the work of the script editor in providing complimentary notes is one of the ways in which this relationship is articulated. Andrew Ellard describes the objective role that a

script editor must perform in terms of his ability to critique Comedy and still enjoy it at the same time:

“There’s a practical consideration and then there’s a taste thing...it’s delineating between taste and quality. It’s being aware that you don’t have to like something for it to be good, and you don’t have to dislike something for it to be bad”.

The measurement of quality and the perception of where corrections and notes will enhance a programme’s quality, then, is an objective process quite separate from the personal taste of the script editor. David Mitchell describes his experiences with being offered script editing work on Comedy projects and his inability to be objective in his editing or overcome, in a sense, the writer in himself and his own authorial voice:

“I sort of said 'oh, alright, I'll have a go'. But I'd read something that someone's written and go 'well, that's good about it'. But the only thing I think is, 'well that's not what I would've written'. Good and bad it's not what I would've written. And that's not a very helpful note (!). That sort of told me that I should concentrate on writing what I would've written and leave the editing to other people”.

While the emphasis on the writer in talk around television Comedy’s creative processes gives the role great significance and impresses an emphatic value on this type of creative labour, this does not assume that writers can perform any role in Comedy production. In fact, the strength of Mitchell’s creative voice hinders his objective criticism of another writer’s script. Although it is possible to assume that the work of the script editor is comparable to that of the writer, the talk around script editing, particularly with Andrew Ellard, is less around writing jokes or making moments ‘funnier’, and more about how the mechanics of the script facilitate the perception of funniness through structure, characterisation and narrative. This attention to the mechanics of the script emphasises a uniqueness around script editing, that it is a particular set of skills that improve the quality of television Comedy programmes and that it should be understood and talked about as such for it not to be rendered invisible or without creative worth.

The uniqueness of the role of script editor is also complicated by the different forms that the position takes, although not all are entirely useful to Comedy. Andrew Ellard makes explicit three different types of script writing roles there are on different kind of projects, which he describes as “the conduit, the contributor and the consultant”.

The work of the conduit script editor, Ellard states, is the kind associated with soap operas and is largely organising long running series rather than dealing with the writing process at a base level: "...it's a wealth of admin, because you've got these actors available and you've got twelve story-lines to do and you have to hit that beat at that one...it's very practical". He states that this practical administrative work in Comedy is part of the producer's role.

The role of consultant script editor is what Ellard describes as largely what his job entails: "getting to the best version of the thing you already want to write". Once again the language around the writer's creative vision operates around a kind of truth or pre-determined, pre-destined phenomenon. The language isolates this creative vision from the process through which it becomes the programme that is broadcast, where the components of its format are brought together over time and with the input of a number of individuals in different creative and collaborative roles. While this talk does not ignore the fact that assistance is needed in developing this creative vision, there is a sense in which script editing and other developmental roles are separated in terms of their creative value – it helps creativity but in essence is not itself creative.

Lastly Ellard describes the contributor script editing role, stating that it is "most peculiar to comedy". The word 'contributor' refers explicitly to the contribution that this kind of script editor makes to writing the script itself and in this sense this form of the role, much more associated with producing Comedy, is the script editing role most intertwined with the creative act of writing: "you just want another voice, you just want more jokes". This role, according to Ellard, is a kind of compromise between having a script editor, someone who gives extensive notes and feedback, and a co-writer who shares both the writing work and the writing credit. Giving as example Paul Alexander's work on *Red Dwarf*, Ellard points out that these contributors may write entire episodes of a series and have given notes and extra material on every other episode, but their title is not as 'writer'.

This role once credited more often as script editor, such as with Alexander, is now referred to as contributor of "additional material" on sitcom or sketch shows:

"...with *Up the Women* [BBC Four, 2013-2015] and *Miranda* and shows like that, they put the writer's name at the beginning and then 'additional material' turns up and six more names go past, which bugs me because in both those cases that person is already the star".

As such the contribution this kind of script editing makes is a process of writing which under this title does not get fully recognised: "...you'd love your credits to be reflective of the actual process of being part of the marketing". Without a writing credit then, this suggests, these script editors remain invisible as writers and without the creative value that their collaboration on the script and the extent to which they contribute material might otherwise afford them.

Ellard's frustration with this distinction of creative value that operates through the naming of certain roles in Comedy production and development is with his confidence in his own creative voice. When speaking about his own writing, rather than script editing, he talks about getting passionate and angry about a subject in order to get beyond his practical editing skills:

"I do worry, as a writer I worry that I lack a voice. The stuff that I'm writing is structurally sound and the characters are clear and all that sort of thing but underneath it all, is there a thing I'm pissed about or excited about? And I worry because my editing is so pragmatic that my writing's ended up that way too".

Paul Doolan states that he is "too much of a writer" to be a good script editor and that instead of giving good notes he will simply "try to re-write...my idea which I think is funnier, which isn't a good way to script edit". This echoes Mitchell's quote above which similarly indicates that he finds it hard to guide the creative voice of others: "...the only thing I think is, that's not what I would've written".

According to this rhetoric, the skill set of the script editor is, to an extent, at odds with the specific creative labour of being a writer: one is objective and one is subjective. And given the celebrated role of the writer, Ellard's concern that he lacks a writer's voice is understandable given that conversely the role of script editor is rendered invisible in the shadow of writing with a capital "W". This is problematic when considering the idea that, according to Ellard, "[a]s a script editor...you are a quality thing, you are a gift with purchase, you make the show better". Contrary to the invisibility of the script editor in terms of celebrated creative roles in Comedy, there is also a rhetoric whereby the addition of a script editor is a guarantee of a better script and a better quality show. So is there a disconnection between the value of the script editor and the visibility of the role implicit in Ellard's concern about his own writing voice and clarity of authorship?

The role of script editor is also described as a precarious one, not gaining the recognition of the writing processes involved in accreditation, but also in the inconsistency with which the role is included or excluded from production and development processes depending on available funds and the general attitude of producers about the role. Ellard describes again the various different roles a script editor might serve:

“Sometimes you come in when it's just an idea, in fact that's what I'm doing this afternoon. I did a day for them where I turned the pitch into a fully rounded sitcom. It was an idea and a set of characters, but you looked at it and you go I don't know where the tensions are, I don't know what the crisis will be...Now we've figured that out...one of the channels is interested”.

Without the input of a script editor it is possible that individual projects will not get past the preliminary stage. But the characterisation of the role of script editor means that this is not always something of which writers can take advantage.

“If you've got a writer in charge of the tone of the show and knows what they want to do, and they've already got a producer giving them notes, they've got a cast giving them their input, it's very easy as a producer to go 'we need to save X amount of money from the budget. We're going to get scripts either way, the script editor doesn't make scripts appear. And he doesn't make it cheaper. So what's the advantage?”

Ellard constructs this as once again a misunderstanding of the mechanics of making successful Comedy on the part of the producers and executives:

“Of course it makes the show better, but their biggest consideration at that point is getting it made at all. Unfortunately the script editor role is something where people go, yeah I can't really afford...um...”

The fact that the role of the script editor is important to the production of Comedy and that it can make a project “better” is implicit in the role Ellard served at ITV early on in his career when then newly appointed Head of Comedy at ITV Paul Jackson wanted to make the network an attractive place to bring Comedy:

“...they were trying to get the big boys, good names...so they put me on the books...as somebody who would get involved when a script was green lit to go to either a pilot or to series...so my notes from ITV were going, almost as a free gift with purchase: 'you're making comedy ITV now? Here's a guy who's on your side and

wants to help you make it even better. Take the notes, don't take the notes, but here's a gift from us of how to improve things”.

So there is a definite sense here that a script editor is somebody that encourages and inevitably can help writers improve their work and that having an available in-house script editor makes a broadcaster much more attractive to big name Comedy creatives and a more competitive institution in inviting established writers and on screen talent. However, while the script editing role is a “quality thing”, it is also described as a gift and somewhat as a luxury for new writers rather than a necessary collaborative element. But if a script editor is a luxury, then what of low budget Comedy productions, featuring unknown talent, which are already described as financially risky for the channel?

The importance of the script editor’s understanding of how to improve new Comedy projects is implicit in the ways in which television executives give feedback to those working on programmes at production level. Ellard’s distinction between the usefulness of the notes that channel executives might give, and the notes that he might give, are based on a level of closeness or intimacy with the creative intent of the writer:

“And I would give those notes to the production company and people involved. But rather than them be channel notes, which are the ones that make your heart sink, where they go 'we need a blonde!', 'can everyone be nicer? I just wish we liked everyone more!'....Instead of that, I always said my job as a script editor, and I've only figured this out in retrospect, it's to get the writer to the best version of what they're trying to get anyway, rather than what I want it to be or what some executive or producer wants it to be”.

There is more on the interference of channel executives and commissioners below. But there is a clear distinction that Ellard makes between channel notes and his own, based on their usefulness and the contributor’s awareness of what will make a Comedy better. This talk maintains the idea that those with a closer claim to knowing Comedy at production level, who are separate to the interests of the channel more broadly, are more successful increasing the quality of a Comedy project. However, for Ellard, this quality is undermined by the intangibility of the role of the script editor.

If a script editor is able to take an idea and turn it into a fully formed sitcom as Ellard suggests, then the failure to find time and money to supply that role might render many potentially successful programmes, and their writers, unreachable. While Nerys Evans describes the

development role, as a commissioner, a maternal one that facilitates some of the practical problem solving of making a sitcom or sketch show viable, the role of script editor here is one that can be objective about a Comedy project, but from the perspective of understanding the writing process itself and the language with which writers develop their own voice. In this sense, is the emphasis placed on the Comedy writer as author a misnomer that perpetuates the myth that great creativity is the communication of a unique and gifted voice? With the crucial process of developing and teaching new writers how to craft their voices, could Channel 4 Comedy be better served asking what kind of script editor is required for a project, rather than if one is needed at all?

Additionally, in terms of the broader discourse of Comedy creativity and authorship, this exacerbates the notion that the uniqueness and the talent of the writer are innate, rather than a skillset that can be taught or learned. As such, if this mythology around the Comedy writer persists, then Channel 4's remit to find new talent from diverse backgrounds is undermined by the ways in which this denies access to the industry to those who might provide new and alternative voices in British television Comedy.

#### **Channel Notes: “They have good thoughts but they don’t know how to articulate them”**

The implication in Ellard’s description above is that channel notes tend to be too broad because channel executives lack a full awareness of the mechanics of comedy – while channel executives might be aware that a problem needs solving, they are not always, according to Ellard, able to grasp the exact site of the problem as Ellard would.

As Mitchell’s description above suggests, the commissioners who are most useful to the creative process in producing television Comedy are those that have a claim to being funny themselves, having been writers or “getting” Comedy. Elsewhere Paul Doolan describes Shane Allen and Nerys Evans as being particularly good commissioners to work with because they themselves are “very funny people”.

However, there is discourse amongst the creative practitioners’ talk that frames executives as forces of detrimental interference: David Mitchell speaks of positive and negative levels

of channel intervention and there being an “interfering school”. Paul Doolan states that there are times when he'll get notes from an executive “that you know are rubbish”. There is a sense that interference or that giving a note in the wrong way might fall on deaf ears, but that despite the authorship and prestige afforded to the Comedy writer, commissioners and executives can override this creative voice. However at this stage in his career, Doolan just “get[s] on and do[es] it”. While he maintains that the creative authority lies with the writer as author, he refers to this kind of work as being hired to do a job, the result of which should be to the preference of the employer:

“It's like hiring a plumber, even though they'd know better than you...you're still paying them to do it. Like if they recommend a different sink...this is a terrible analogy...if you're hiring someone to fit a kitchen for you, you're still the one hiring them to do it, and it has to be to your taste and you're the one who has to live with it”.

Doolan's perspective on writing in British television Comedy does not, or has yet to become, laden with a sense of driving the creative impetus himself, as is commonplace to other writers and to those interviewed at commissioning level. The analogy between being hired to write and being hired to be a plumber makes clear his feelings about taking script notes and making adjustments as a functional process, far removed from understandings of creative labour. But while he talked less of the isolated writing process that Bain has spoken about and more of the more instructional process he has worked under, he still talks of knowing better than the commissioners and producers who give such notes from the outside. He states “sometimes you get really shit notes and you just have to suck it up”, which is in stark contrast to the kind of creative freedom, an excessive creative freedom, that he says happens when writers are well established and go unquestioned. Doolan still concedes however that there is a sense of taking these producer notes grudgingly.

“Every time I get a script note I'll have half an hour of muttering and thinking 'that's bollocks'. But then you just get on with the work...the thing about taking notes, the only way I can really do it is just to get that time down every time, between thinking the notes are rubbish and actually realised they're good and engaging with it”.

Ultimately Doolan's attitude, begrudging of getting notes on a script as he is - “nobody wants to do more work” - is that notes are an inevitable part of bringing a script together, which is inevitable precisely because it can be useful to improving the quality of the programme, rather than just being interference:

“Whenever you write anything, it's the same when you write an essay, all you wanna hear is 'that's really good, we won't change a thing'. But it's never true, it never makes a better show”.

For David Mitchell, however, the best a commissioner can generally do is take a step back from the creative process entirely and allow the writers to be the authors they are constructed as within these interviews:

“I'm of the opinion that if you commission someone to make a programme you just have to let them go and make it. And if it's no good you don't let them make any more...I think you have to have proper creative delegation where they say 'okay, we trust you with this large amount of money and that air time and we think you know what you're doing and you can, within reason, have your head on this'. I don't want to specifically slag off people who have stuck their oar in...but it does happen, and it's usually a bad idea”.

The idea of creative delegation makes the distinction very clear between the creative institution as a facilitator of television Comedy production and the creative practitioners as the designers and authors of what will characterise the programme as a whole. For Mitchell, the useful creative input of the commissioner is limited to “...small points. Another pair of eyes with a bit of distance on something is sometimes helpful on little things, but if they actually try and co-produce it, it gets dragged off track”.

So for Mitchell, channel executives who keep an arm's length attitude to programmes are preferable – rather than managers of creativity, those without the direct knowledge of writing Comedy become “suits” and as such should allow the creativity to be in the hands of those at production level. However, there is little to discern where the line is drawn between what is considered a small and useful contribution and what amounts to a disruptive level of interference. In fact, much of the talk around the practitioners' experiences with commissioners is varied in its levels of positivity, hostility and empathy. However, measuring the level of involvement and knowing when to stand back from a project is part of the commissioning role according to Mitchell:

“And I don't envy them that judgement. I'd certainly, in their shoes, be in the interfering school. That's one of the reasons why I got into another part of the business”.

It is logical through these discourses and as is suggested here, that as a creative practitioner and specifically as a writer, Mitchell's voice is implicitly highly authored and so would be too disruptive to another writer's vision for him to be objective about how their project should develop. It is also through the construction of this authored voice in the writer, as I will examine below, that Mitchell talks about why he doesn't believe he should script edit.

Nevertheless, while the definition of what is interference and what is useful guidance remains blurry, there is a distinct boundary between the roles of commissioners and the writers: the former as practical problem solvers, but not as creative, and the latter whose entire occupation is defined by a sense of creative authorship. Indeed, the television Comedy show in this context is defined as successful if it tells the story the writer(s) want to tell and their voice is distinct and prominent.

To contrast this with talk around Entertainment commissions, Gorman and Beck spoke of the collaboration upon and the development of the format as what brings about a broad, well-rounded and successful programme. As such, what is referred to as channel interference in Comedy is an unproblematic part of the development of Entertainment programmes.

But while there *is* talk around commissioners and execs as interfering, Ellard is keen to point out that there are varying levels of usefulness in what generally is deemed as "interference". There is a sense that Ellard's understanding of the mechanics of Comedy is what positions him as mediator between the channel's notes and criticisms and the writers at ground level. One of the roles that becomes apparent in Ellard's talk around his experiences with script editing is a sense of second guessing what it is channel executives mean when they give their own notes on a script or deciphering what initially seems unhelpful, but can point to an element of a script that can and should be improved:

"It's very easy to go, it's interference! It's a nightmare! The biggest thing is normally that they have good thoughts but they don't know how to articulate them...there's one guy who is lovely and has great insight, but whose notes made writers want to walk off cliffs, you just wanted to die when you read them, it just made you feel incompetent, stupid and useless".

The language used to describe the effect of these comments on writers is very strong and clearly there is a sense that the disconnect between the understanding that channel executives and writers have over a Comedy script can have a detrimental effect over a writers' willingness to take criticism. But Ellard's position as script editor is one that allows

him access to both the commissioner's intention and what is the source of the criticism. He continues of the same executive:

"...eventually there was a time when I got sent his notes in order to translate them...all his notes were useful, it was just the way they were couched...you don't always look at the note, you look at the reason for the note...if they're like, 'This character isn't strong', and you track it back and you go actually, this character is strong all the way through, what they're not is proactive".

Ellard reinforces the distance between those who work in television in commissioning editor roles and those who work as creative practitioners. In this sense there is an important translation role that script editors can perform in marrying what Ellard describes as the "gut feeling" that commissioners and executive producers might have about a script and the mechanics of writing that only those working at the ground level creative process can put into practice. So the role of the script writer, described here, is not just the creative input into the script which is specific in its own right according to Mitchell, but also a role of industrial negotiation that prevents the sometimes misplaced criticism of channel executives from affecting writers' sense of creative legitimacy.

However, writer Doolan is also aware of this disconnect; in his talk around commissioners and making adjustments to scripts based on channel notes that he doesn't necessarily immediately agree with he says that sometimes he has to figure out what the commissioner is really trying to get at:

"[S]ometimes...the note the exec's given you isn't what they mean, they just don't know it. You have to find of learn to read between the lines. There was something I was doing recently where the notes came back, 'the beginning feels like it needs a load more gags...so put a load more gags in the first five pages...and I looked at it and realised that the main story hadn't kicked off 'til about six or seven pages in and that's why it felt like something was missing...they felt like they weren't engaging with it so it must not be funny enough".

The lack of common language between Comedy creatives and the channel executives who finance their work is where the disconnect lies. But it also reinforces a sense that there has to be a level of intimacy and closeness with a Comedy project and an understanding and language around the mechanics of Comedy in order to make for useful notes.

So while all television production is inevitably a collaborative process, the notion of authorship that is used to define Comedy is potentially a destructive, or at least limiting, one – if the role of script editor is undermined or understood as transient or expendable, and the input of the commissioners and channel executives is called interference, then the uniqueness and priority of the Comedy writer denies the assistance required in the process of development and production of “quality” content.

Having established the sense in which at least the role of script editor is rendered precarious because of the discourse of authorship that surrounds the development and production of television sitcom and sketch shows, I look now to the distinctions made by the creative practitioners around different types of comedy programmes and in particular to David Mitchell’s experiences of work on both comedy with a big and little ‘c’.

### **Distinctions of Quality in Constructing Comedy and Entertainment**

As part of their methods of distinguishing between good and bad work, Hesmondhalgh and Baker use criteria not only of the conditions and process of creative work, such as high earnings, autonomy, security and self-realisation, but also of the creative product. That is, they take into account the “social and cultural value of products” as means of determining “good” creative work (2011: 36). Their definition is based on determining the quality of the product and the extent to which it contributes to the common good (39). I’ve noted above that there is little attention paid in the participants’ talk around why individual projects fail, at least in the sense of a failure in their creative value or quality. There is talk of reality television which, as a genre, Mitchell considers to be detrimental in its nature to television’s overall quality as a medium.

As this thesis has shown, there is, at each level of investigation, a discursively constructed distinction between shows that attract large audiences as having fewer claims to discourses of creativity and quality than programmes that reach smaller and more passionate audiences. But I also argue that the use of value judgements as a way of both making and justifying this distinction depends on the reconstruction of cultural hierarchies that reconstruct social hierarchies.

But to follow with this study's attention to the specificity of the production of television Comedy, how do these creative practitioners construct distinctions between comedy texts? What, within these distinctions, might we glean about good and bad comedy work and what industrial conditions these comedy workers perceive to affect their work?

Ellard uses *Peep Show* to make the distinction between ratings and quality: "that doesn't have fantastic numbers. It's such a prestige show for the channel, it's an award winner, it's a quality thing". Paul Doolan uses his Sky sitcom *Trollied* (2011 - ) to make a distinction between intellectual and large audiences: "[it's] not geared to a kind of liberal middle class intelligentsia, it's quite a broad, family thing". He uses this distinction as basis for another distinction between quality and popularity: "you'll usually find if the critics don't like it, people will and vice versa". When I asked Sam Bain about the distinction between ratings and reviews, he makes the link to a differentiation between industry awards and audiences: "...when awards are at their best, they're actually saying 'ok you may not have noticed this show, but we did and it's really good'". The ways in which the creative practitioners describe certain sitcoms and sketch programmes reflect the discourses of quality programming that we see constructed by Comedy Department executives, Evans and Allen.

But my attention for this section turns to the particular distinctions that David Mitchell makes between working on Comedy programmes and Entertainment programmes. While Mitchell is the only one of the creative practitioners who can compare these generic categories from first hand, as he is the only one who traverses sitcom, sketch and panel show comedies, I think it is important to include this production level rhetoric as it is so reflective and articulate around the distinction that is made at the institutional level at Channel 4.

As Section Two of this thesis calls into account, there are distinctions of cultural value that manifest in discourses around where Comedy or comedy production is distributed departmentally at Channel 4. One of the distinctions between generic categories that was noted in the departmental categorisation of Comedy and Entertainment programmes was made through a discourse of heritage and creative identity as cultural value, and it is in this sense that what is referred to as the 'quality' of the creative product is here constructed.

Though Mitchell makes distinctions based on more traditional textual generic categories, he also makes a number of statements about his own work, for shows that are departmentally categorised as either Comedy or Entertainment, that pertain differently to distinctions of cultural and creative value. And again, as seen in Allen and Evans' interviews, it is through a

sense of the temporal, of enduring appreciation and of heritage that these distinctions are made.

At an individual level for the creative practitioner, the discourses of quality that operate institutionally overlap and intercept in talk around programming commissioned by the Comedy and Entertainment departments respectively. In David Mitchell's interview, these discourses manifest not only in talk around the quality of the programme or the character of the comedy text, but the pleasures of production and sense of prestige that he associates with his work on both sitcom and panel shows.

There is a distinction between the creative pleasures and ease between writing and performing in Mitchell's talk around making Comedy, relating to difficulty, fun and the extent to which he feels a sense of being creative. But he also makes a similar distinction between the Comedy formats. Speaking of panel shows he states, "I think in terms of the experience of doing it, panel shows are the most fun". The fun aspect of appearing on panel shows is emphasised with the immediacy of performing in front of a live studio audience, and the improvisational aspect that Mitchell states is crucial to making a panel show funny and in some sense is more creative:

"If you've got that immediate buzz from the audience reaction, you're thinking on your feet so you feel if you've come up with something funny you've been creative in a way you don't feel if you've memorised a line and delivered it. Which is the key part of acting [pause] so, yeah. I find that the most fun".

While there is an element of scripting involved in panel shows, according to Mitchell, the spontaneity, immediacy and urgency of this kind of performance, again, is what makes the format successful:

"There's writing in terms of, well you need various auto-cue jokes to link between rounds that's all got to be pre-written and I don't get involved with the question setting. You're prepared along those lines, but in terms of how I feed that information in and the conversation that comes off the back of that, that's all unprepared and it just happens as it happens. And I think that's a very important part of a panel show's *reason d'etre*".

This *reason d'etre*, as Mitchell calls it, is what distinguishes the pleasures of both the production and performance of panel shows and suggests the pleasures that the format

offers its audiences. He also frames this positive characteristic as quite oppositional to scripted Comedy:

“That's what a panel show offers to a viewer that isn't provided for in other areas of comedy: conversations that spark off that would never be scripted”.

It is in fact when panel shows are scripted that they become less valuable for Mitchell, so here, with someone who has a lot of experience and investment in a positive view of panel shows and their comic pleasures, the notion that programming which is “scripted” in the way that the Comedy Department's content is described, does not necessarily indicate quality or cultural value:

“I think it's very foolish when people try and over prepare panel shows, which does sometimes happen. If you try and script what people say in a panel show, it's pointless. If you want to script it, go away and write a sitcom or a sketch show, and it'll be scripted in a more [pause] likeable scenario, if you see what I mean?”

Without spontaneity and a sense of being unscripted, the format of the comedy panel show becomes obsolete: the creative impulse and cultural value of panel shows is in fact in the very unscripted-ness of the format. Therefore it is in fact vital, on Mitchell's terms, for those creative practitioners who want to script comedy to do so in the conventional “scripted” formats of sitcom and sketch show.

“To justify a panel show's existence, I think you have to have genuinely off the cuff sparky conversation that only exists because that group of people are together in front of that audience, discussing this sort of fertile topic. And the way to make a panel show funny enough is to over record and edit bits out that don't work, not script it”.

Mitchell's understanding of panel shows is as a format that creates something totally unique in each episode that cannot be recreated quite in the same way elsewhere in different circumstances. So while the format might be criticised as inherently repetitive and even the creative talent similarly repetitious, Mitchell suggests that the strength of panel shows lies not by being led by the format but by the on screen talent and the joking behaviours with which they engage.

There is a distinction, however, between the pleasures that Mitchell describes of some of his creative work and the sense of value that he describes of others, differentiating in terms of

the live-ness of performance and the longevity of resonance that the creative product might have. Firstly he talks about the pleasures of working on panel programmes:

“In terms of the experience of doing it, panel shows are the most fun...that immediate buzz from the audience reaction, you’re thinking on your feet so you feel if you’ve come up with something funny, you’ve been creative in a way you don’t feel if you’ve memorised a line and delivered it”.

Once again, the creative strength of a moment of television comedy for Mitchell, is the sense that he has some authorship over the line that gets a laugh. In a sense, writing the line on the spot and performing is more pleasurable than acting out another writer’s script. While this pleasure informs Mitchell’s understanding of the value of panel shows noted above, in that they are entertaining for their spontaneity and live-ness, he does not award it the same enduring quality that he does of other forms of comedy television such as sitcom.

“People like watching panel shows and that’s great, but it’s definitely a more disposable form of television. People will watch *Fawlty Towers* [BBC Two, 1975 – 1979] and they will watch that forever, but they’re not watching repeats of *Call My Bluff* [BBC Two, 1965-1994; BBC One, 1997-2005] from the same era”.

The pleasure Mitchell gets from making sitcom and sketch shows, rather than the immediacy of creative activity of panel shows, is in the endurance of scripted Comedy and ultimately the prestige that brings to his career:

“I think my career would be less satisfying to me if all I did was panel shows. I love doing them and I do them a lot but I try and make sure I’m doing the slightly harder work which I can look back with pride and that people might even continue to watch more than an episode of *Have I Got News For You?* [BBC Two, 1990-2000; BBC One, 2000] that I thought went well”

The pleasures and its values of Comedy work, then, intersect in these different programme formats as sites of the construction of cultural value. Key to the understanding of why sitcom and sketch shows are important to Mitchell here, is that people enjoy them for a long time, they are not disposable like panel shows and they will ultimately bring more value to his opinion of his own career for these criteria.

So if a sense of longevity and endurance attributes cultural value to sitcom and sketch programmes, where are these elements being threatened in the current industrial context? Is there a sense in which the ‘fun-ness’ and immediacy of creating panel shows threatens the

continued attention of broadcasters to Comedy with a capital 'C'? Is the sense that sitcom and sketch show production is more difficult, a characteristic associated with high cultural value and big 'C' creativity, being jeopardised in an industrial climate increasingly concerned with competition? What implications are there for a broadcaster like Channel 4, as one that uses Comedy to prove its fulfilment of its public service remit, if creative practitioners feel that a sense of Comedy's heritage, as a mark of its cultural value and public service, is being lost?

### **Mainstream Television Comedy and the Risk of Prime Time: Safety in Numbers?**

While Evans and Allen talked about the impatience of Comedy audiences with appreciating programmes over time, the creative practitioners also note that there is an impatience within the industry itself which is similarly problematic. As the next section will highlight, the shifting landscape of British broadcasting, in terms of the expansion, digitalisation and online access, has exacerbated the emphasis placed on gaining high audiences, quickly. While commissioners' interference in relation to the creative process of producing Comedy is said to disrupt the quality and truth of a project, there are more practical limitations that creative practitioners find disruptive. Because of this, the role of television Comedy commissioners, as this section will show, is said at the site of production to be more problematic for creative practitioners than it once was. The sense that this is a new problem for Comedy creatives is also constructed through a nostalgic sense of pre-digitalisation production practice.

Paul Doolan talks about this period for television Comedy, before his own career had begun and which he has not experienced first-hand. Talking about what he has heard from others in the industry, there was a time when commissioners' patience with programmes was said to be standard:

"It's easy to hark after the olden days that you hear about where you'd go into the BBC and they'll tell you 'here's a first series of twenty, we'll see how that goes and we'll probably give you a second. Find an audience'. You don't really get the time to find an audience anymore".

Mitchell talks about the commissioning environment he first met when trying to break into Comedy as a positive and welcoming one, where commissioners were actively interested in sourcing new talent:

“From the point when we got an agent, there were certainly a lot of people who were very happy to talk to us about ideas, and their doors were open and we felt like we were being taken seriously... [They] want to talk to new people, they want to go to Edinburgh and see shows”.

The pursuit of new talent was there as, by his use of the present tense, presumably it still is. The problem at commissioning level, however, “wasn't getting people willing to pitch ideas with us and was not getting development money but it was actually getting programmes commissioned”. Even this difficulty, Mitchell states, is increasing: “I think there is a big problem from development onto the screen. And I'm very glad, it was tough when Rob [Webb] and I did it, but it must be even tougher now”.

The difficulty perceived here with getting projects to the point where they go to series is when money is introduced and the risks implicit with investing the large sums it takes to make television Comedy panics commissioners.

“They want to listen to new ideas, but when it comes to pressing the green button on the vast sum of money it costs to make even a cheap programme they suddenly go 'oh fucking hell, no one's going to watch this! No one's heard of these people!'”

The desire to invest is now compromised by the panic and fear associated with spending lots of money on a new Comedy programme, which is also linked explicitly to the fear of commissioning unknown talent that audiences will not recognise. Despite Channel 4 Comedy's express remit to develop new talent and in doing so encourage other British broadcasters to do the same, the financial risk of doing so creates hesitance. Mitchell states that this hesitance is an increasing problem due to the expansion of television:

“Television didn't have to worry about a programme dying because it didn't have a star attached, but now it's a much more beleaguered medium and there are loads more channels and there are loads more media”.

Previously, Mitchell states, this was not a problem for television executives because the strength of the terrestrial channels' audiences, and television's status as an “alpha medium”, meant that commissioners could launch talent without the concern of whether they were a known talent:

“Television was such a powerful medium...they could say, 'well no one's heard of them now, but after one episode's gone out, they'll be famous they'll be famous because they've been on TV and a minimum of eight million people would've watched them”.

Mitchell attributes a greater sense of confidence in past practices because audiences were less divided between so many channels. While he never suggests that new talent was less innovative or progressive than it is in this more frightened time, or that it was less precarious in terms of whether audiences would watch a new programme straight away, he does state that the risk of failure, of not gaining high ratings early on, is a more severe concern in the industry than ever before. Mitchell positions his understanding of the role of commissioners as difficult because of the tension caused by the financial risk involved in investing in new, and specifically unknown, talent. As managers of creativity, this tension lies between the occupation of the creatives, the restrictions of the channel, and its requirements to reach audiences. He states that this nervousness has occurred at an increasing rate, particularly in light of the dispersal of British television audiences across a fuller range of non-terrestrial channels and new media platforms.

In this sense, the power of television was in creating celebrity, not through the choice of audiences necessarily but just by virtue of this talent appearing on television. Rather than commissioners being necessarily any more confident in unknown Comedy talent in the past than they are now, it was more the power and ubiquity of television content that created this security in ratings.

Indeed, Mitchell doesn't so much describe past methods of launching new talent as being based in the confidence of commissioners in the creativity of the output, but instead states that not having a star connected to the marketing just “wasn't a problem” and something television “didn't have to think about”. So is it that previously commissioners were able to invest in new talent that they were confident in and now they are in a position where they can't invest in new talent because of an increasingly precarious ratings culture?

This new state for television, which is described by both David Mitchell and Paul Doolan, affects the kinds of Comedies getting made for terrestrial channels. For Channel 4 in particular, the idea that commissioners are scared to source and develop unknown talent is particularly problematic because it implies that Channel 4 as a network are too frightened to invest in new risky Comedy talent as they once did.

In terms of the temporal, the creative practitioners construct a nostalgia for when greater time and money were awarded to new Comedy projects as this is no longer the state of the industry at the time of interview:

“You're aware you're making programmes where people are willing to give new comedy a try. But you don't get much, the whole industry is so frightened, you don't get much of a sense of a confidence in heritage at the moment”.

Mitchell's talk around working with broadcasters as a writer and performer of Comedy is one beset with the idea that the ways in which Comedy was made in the past was far safer and more secure than the industrial conditions he describes at the time of interview. Again, it's the lack of confidence to take creative risks that is the most prominent crisis point in Mitchell's description, which is connected directly to financial limitations.

“I think there's a terrible fear around that maybe we just won't be making programmes in this way for very much longer. Maybe this doesn't work now. And people are frightened and sad at the prospect of that”.

Implicitly the greater sense of security that television Comedy used to enjoy, when launching new on screen talent, was a consequence not of greater creativity or confidence of commissioners in the talent itself, but of the power and ubiquity of television as a domestic medium. The confidence in launching new unknown talent was, according to Mitchell, because audiences had only a few channels to choose from and as such television had the power to establish new talent as famous and familiar by virtue of broadcasting their work at all.

The shift away from television being “the alpha medium” has caused these concerns around ratings, presumably across generic categories. However, with regards to the impact of this environment on Comedy in particular, Ellard, describing a conversation he had had with Sam Bain, states that writers are no longer interested in making popular Comedy: he describes prime time in the BBC One schedule as “an ungodly slot” and a desperation at the BBC with wanting 5 million viewers to sit down and watch a sitcom on live television – “nobody's watching...there's too much content around, chances are you're not even watching scheduled TV anymore”. When Comedy has an established alternative arm, aimed at niche audiences that has the room to take creative risks, Ellard states that in this environment of precariousness, writers prefer to aim lower in terms of audience expectations. Because of the shifts in television technology and viewing habits, Ellard argues:

“[W]hy would a writer want to write a mainstream prime time sitcom? [...] the minute you’re in that bumble bee slot, everyone wants to make sure it works...and it’s a shame because it means that writers genuinely aren’t pursuing big audiences, because it’s not in their interest creatively to do so”.

According to Ellard, the “bumble bee slot”, the BBC One prime time position that shouldn’t fly but sometimes does with hits like *Miranda* and *Mrs Brown’s Boys*, is a far greater risk for Comedy writers. It is not in their interest creatively or financially to take on the task of trying to appeal to big audiences, when “you don’t get paid any more than they do for *Peep Show* or for Channel 4 ten o’clock sitcoms”.

This is also a condition of the industry as it is now, according to Ellard, and one constructed around channel predictions for that particular point in the schedule:

“The expectation of the slot is more important than the actual number. If people expect 1.2 million and you get 1.3 you’re a terrific success in your slot, if they expect two [million] and you get 1.3 you’re now a failure”.

Again, the slot with the bigger audience attached is the riskier one for writers and there is a safety in low expectations. What’s more, the creative voice is what gets compromised most in these slots, even though the writer is attributed the greatest responsibility for failure. In the bumble bee slot writers lose control over their creative voice because “everybody is trying to enforce their idea of what the show is on top. And unless you’re protective, unless you’ve got a producer who’s batting those notes back and saying let it be, that’s going to keep happening...there’s no upside for writers to take on those slots”.

Television as a medium, then, is in a weaker position in terms of its ability to create quality content for large audiences, because of the extent to which audiences are divided by the number of television channels available to viewers as well as new media entertainment. As such, there is also a correlation between the broadening of digital media, and the ways in which the creative industries and the knowledge economy have become so central to the post-industrialist knowledge economy (Banks, 2007: 73). With the increased inclusion of creativity and cultural workplaces in this knowledge economy, and the new ways in which creativity is written about as a managerial technique (70), has the significance of economic imperatives in broader creative business activity had an effect on the autonomy of the creative worker in more traditional creative positions, such as that of Comedy writer? If there is a broader fetishism of creativity within policy and institutional procedures intended to

stimulate economic growth, as Bank argues, in what sense do channel executives, as with other creative managers, “seek to define and control the parameters of creativity from above” (69)? For these practitioners, such management is the current greatest source of creative repression as it cuts short the space and time required for the cultural value of these luxury items to resonate with audiences.

The problematic industrial state that Ellard, Doolan and Mitchell describe is one where the terrestrial broadcasters are unable to invest in the development of new talent, because audiences are too divided between the range of channels and online content. The consequence for television Comedy broadly, as Ellard outlines, is that niche programming that does not have to reach large audiences in order to fulfil its social purpose, that which Channel 4 is charged with commissioning, is actually the safer place for Comedy writers. Because of these conditions, Comedy and creativity are being repelled from the mainstream and from the site of the broad audience, popular form of sitcom and sketch shows.

What's more, while the technological changes in British television might make this nostalgic view for the past industry stability understandable amongst creative practitioners, the security of fewer channels and less content is implicitly problematic for diverse voices being brought to the fore and subsequently for the positioning of audiences. Returning to the political broadcasting models in the New Left Article “Television Supplement”, Mitchell's description of the past power and ubiquity of television and the attraction of high ratings through a lack of choice is indeed problematic. While it might be easier to absorb more captive audiences in a system with fewer channels, which makes launching programmes easier for those in the industry, there is no acknowledgement that this paternalistic way of producing television and establishing creative talent is through saturation rather than quality necessarily. Indeed, there is no mention that Comedy talent is just of a lower standard in the post-digital era and therefore more difficult to champion with financial investment and institutional stability – the quality and creativity, as it is understood, has not diminished.

If it was easier to launch unknown talent because audiences had less choice available in television content across fewer channels, then the condition that Mitchell describes is actually one where audiences are more active as consumers and have greater variety and diversity of messages and pleasures available to their media consumption. Though the expansion of television that all the creative practitioners talk about is largely facilitated by technological advances, there is a sense that the implicit broadening of choice and diversity in content comes from the position that television should not act paternalistically, as it has

in the past. This talk suggests that this expansion is in fact an act of democratising television culture in a way that empowers audiences. So, has the diversity that Channel 4 was based upon, actually rendered the institution's position to create challenging, innovative and creative new Comedy obsolete?

## Conclusions

Due to the three tiered analysis that this research pursues there are sets of conclusions that interact in ways through the complex and shifting discursive constructions that are the basis for this investigation. I have shown the ways in which discourses at industrial, institutional and individual levels construct comedy as a creative form, as a process, a practice and a field of work. The ways in which these constructions align definitions of cultural value in some complimentary but also differing ways reaffirms the complexity of findings offered by a methodological perspective of Foucauldian discourse analysis and a post-structuralist approach more broadly. I will show the findings of each level of analysis and present interventions made through this investigation and further possibilities for analysis. These interventions will show how Channel 4 is created through discourse, how generic classification *creates* comedy, how departmental organisation distributes cultural value based on the discourse of commercialism as at odds with creativity, and how the ways in which creativity is discussed within the processes of producing television comedy distribute creative worth amongst the production work force.

There are some limitations, however, to bear in mind during the overview of these findings. Firstly, as is central to qualitative methodologies, the proposals that I make in applying the comments made by a few participants cannot be said to be necessarily representative conclusions about what it is to be creative at Channel 4 Comedy to all working for and at the broadcaster. However, this method has allowed for a crucial contextualisation that a broader review of participants would not have achieved: the themes that I have sought to isolate in these interviews are always contextualised by the relevant position of who is speaking and are underwritten by the discourses around creativity and cultural value highlighted in the literature. In terms of method, then, this is not with a quantitative analysis of surveys but the unpicking of common themes apparent in detailed interviews and in the discourses that can be seen to be taken for granted through such themes in relation to creativity and comedy. The aim is not to find a definitive truth perceivable through the volume of comedy workers who refer to the same statements, but to look to how their descriptions of television comedy work are understood broadly through discourses of creativity, and how they interact *because* of their individual circumstance.

Secondly, for a study that finds so much evidence of talk around diversity there is a distinct lack of diversity in the participants with whom I gained interviews. The concerns with this are twofold: on one hand it was never my intention to exclude the voices of people of colour and other underrepresented social and cultural groups, and on the other it is also not my wish to overstate a lack of diversity in television comedy by suggesting, through my list of participants, that there are *only* white men making television comedy for Channel 4. This is not true: my initial appeal for participants certainly included comedy workers from broader cultural and social identities but they were unavailable for interview. While I have drawn conclusions about issues of access due to the language used to construct creative work by these practitioners, I do find the resulting lack of variation in perspectives a shortcoming to these results, because I fail to offer the contributory voices of those that the television industry fails to give voice to itself.

Primarily this disparity is due to the methodology of this thesis and its relation to grounded theory, a qualitative study that “uncover[s] patterns of life that the individuals might or might not be aware of” (Engward, 2013: 37). For investigations with a grounded theory approach, research is “led and guided by the experience of the people in the inquiry and the findings reflect patterns in these experiences...the research should not predetermine a priori about what he or she will find...” (37). The pattern of experience under examination here is located in the descriptions of career trajectories, comedy work, generic construction and an institutional and industrial notion of what Channel 4 is. As such, the conclusions about issues of diversity that I draw were not known to me until after the interviews were gathered and collated. As such the lack of diversity in this research is one I could not have anticipated being so relevant to the data gathered. However, I do also reiterate that I see the lack of diversity of voices unsatisfactory, regardless of the direct reference to diversity that this thesis has come to make. This is not justified by, but I tentatively suggest is a consequence of, availability.

However, I would also like to suggest that this lack of diversity might be representative of a finding in itself; while the participants are reflective of this diversity issue, it is also suggestive of the very argument of entitlement upon which the final section of this thesis is based. Whether or not the creative myth discourses analysed in section three might be evident in interviews with BAME, female, disabled or LBTQ comedy workers, this is perhaps indicative of another issue of self-identification. If, as I argue in section three, there are issues with

people from more diverse backgrounds *identifying* with the talk around comedy work as either invisible or exceptional, then perhaps there is a sense in which these individuals were able to identify themselves as useful candidates for an academic study of this sort, as authoritative and with significant contributions to make, where others may not. However, further evidence to support this argument is a difficult framework for investigation: how does an academic inquiry ask a person in a particular industry why they have chosen not to agree to participate in an academic inquiry?

As it is not my aim to prove within the parameters of this research that this kind of language creates tangible barriers that could be reported by various would-be creators of television comedy, it must instead be by the realm of the absence of such participants as evidence for this barrier and as a basis for this argument around creative exceptionalism and its capacity for discrimination. To not entertain the sense in which discourses of exceptionalism create barriers from those who are constructed in a national context as of less economic, political, cultural concern, is irresponsible and to expect those who have successfully gained access to the industry to be both aware and critical of such barriers is naïve. I argue that before an institution such as Channel 4 can work to uncover the talents of workers from more diverse backgrounds those potential workers must aspire towards and identify with the profession. As such the cultural hierarchy used to construct the creative work of Channel 4 Comedy is indicative of and reconstructs the social hierarchy that it is Channel 4's role to negotiate.

As such my aim is to suggest that collaborative creative work be reconceptualised through language that encourages ownership across broader societal plurals. It is here that I suggest new research to further the findings of this investigation and continue the broadening of understanding around creativity, British television comedy and the construction of, and identification with, work of cultural value.

For instance a project more specifically organised around investigating issues of diversity within interviews, rather than around creative practice as this project was described in requests for participants, might encourage a more positive response from underrepresented groups and provide more thorough evidence in this specific area. The themes that are so evident in the interviews here, and as shown in the analysis, are nevertheless contribute to distinctions of cultural value and creative worth in a consistent thematic manner.

## **Section One: British Broadcasting, Public Service and Comedy as Entertainment in Television Policy**

Here the first aim was to look at the discourses that underpinned the specific creative identity under which Channel 4 was originally envisaged and in so doing demonstrate an understanding of cultural value specific to Channel 4. As is shown by the ongoing Programme Policy Statements and the Born Risky campaign launched in 2012, the language of diversity, being alternative and *other* to the mainstream, is still central to the ways in which Channel 4 talks about itself within the changing landscape and rhetoric of British broadcast television.

What Channel 4 is alternative to, however, must be reconsidered in light of cable, satellite and digital television and the much greater volume and range of programming offered to British audiences (Blanchard, 2013). If Channel 4 was set up to be an alternative to the BBC and ITV duopoly of broadcasters this thesis examines Channel 4's understanding of what it means to be alternative now, and from what exactly the broadcaster must show itself to *be* different. As channels with an agenda to produce 'mainstream' programming are well outnumbered by special interest channels within the television marketplace, and if it is true that both broadly in television and in comedy in particular, "niche is the new normal" (Harris, 2008, quoted in Mills, 2006: 46) the sense of what Channel 4 is alternative from is, at first, less clear.

I have demonstrated the ways in which Channel 4 continues to construct its alternative status through its intent address of elsewhere under-represented voices and experiences. As the analysis in the first section shows, the lack of diversity in representation were crucial failings perceived of the British broadcasting industry in the 1970s and underpinned the remedy that Channel 4 was launched to serve. Diversity continues to be a prominent identifying characteristic of Channel 4: at the time of writing, the broadcaster has introduced its 360° Degree Diversity Charter which aims to better represent BAME and LGBT communities, women, disabled people and other underrepresented identities within the institution, both on screen and off. So Channel 4's attention to diversity, in the context of digital television, can be understood as follows: while the programming available from all channels on Freeview may provide an overall diversity to the collective schedule, Channel 4 instead continues to identify itself as an institution as representative of diverse British identities. To be 'Channel

4' is not just to be different from other broadcasters but to embody difference amongst its own programming. Channel 4, then, does not satisfy its requirement to be different or to be alternative purely by being 'not mainstream' but by representing a pluralism that surpasses the quantitative measurement of the 360° Diversity Charter requirements and develops difference amongst identities within its institutional identity. It is not, for instance, enough for Channel 4 to create content that represents, for example, one gay, one Asian or one disabled experience on screen. Its broader responsibility is to show difference within otherwise marginalised communities such as these. In this sense its alternative-ness is now in tension with its mainstream identity as a terrestrial broadcaster, an established creative institution and one that is loaded with legislative responsibility that requires it be for everyone in Britain at least some of the time.

This section also outlines specifically where comedy as a genre has been constructed through discourses of cultural value and what position 'comedy' occupies within British broadcasting policy. It finds that while the genre is present in such policy, it is often constructed as being of less social importance than documentary, film and news programming. Comedy is aligned more with soap operas and game shows, categories of entertainment programming about which the language is more cautionary rather than celebratory. As such, I conclude in the analysis that comedy is constructed by the broader industrial context as of lower cultural status than other generic categories of television programming.

- Section One, then, clarifies the ways in which Channel 4 understands its public service remit and the terms used to motivate its social purpose.
- It addresses the broader national context that constructs Channel 4's contribution to a British public service ethos and understands that Channel 4 was launched as a remedy to the perceived lack of diversity in the existing television industry.
- This lack of diversity, for the first time in British broadcasting policy, referred not only to the subject matter (leisure activities, the arts) of the programmes but the diversity of those represented on screen and the pluralised audiences to whom they would speak.
- This section examines where and how comedy is constructed within the broader policy and finds that it occupies an 'entertainment' category, and that this stands to construct comedy as of lower cultural status.

- The description of these public service aims are talked about in the Annan Report separately to the economic framework that would fund Channel 4.
- There are two types of programming, described through generic categorisation, that are defined by perceived audience reach and a distinction of quality and cerebral engagement.
- Comedy is defined as light entertainment rather than a site of innovation or challenging perceptions.

As section one showed, tied to and in tandem with Channel 4's aim of addressing voices and audiences that are "alternative" or underrepresented in the mainstream, is the idea of taking creative risks. Implicitly, programmes that cater to audiences otherwise neglected by other terrestrial channels are high risk in economic terms and as such are of less concern to commercial broadcasters such as ITV, Channel 5 and Sky and to the requirement placed on BBC One to reach broad audiences. While all programming is high risk as high ratings, proportionate to the expenditure on the programme's production, cannot be guaranteed, it is the *creative* risk that is foregrounded in this understanding of Channel 4's remit and its charge to provide alternative, innovative and as yet untested television programming. As the Born Risky campaign reminds us, Channel 4 uses the idea of providing a space in which creative risks can be taken to differentiate itself from other channels, a rhetoric through which the broadcaster still seeks to publicly define itself and its value, into its fourth decade. This shows how at the industrial level, across British broadcasters, there continues to be a requirement that Channel 4 provides the space for creative risks and the attention to progressive viewpoints or alternative experiences. Diversity and innovation, then, are not only central to Channel 4's public service as it was first established, but this role is still deemed necessary and valuable in the context of British broadcasting at the time of writing. So for the British broadcasting industry's social responsibility, increasing diversity is still an issue that, after more than three decades on the air, Channel 4 must show itself to be tackling.

What Channel 4's public service remit is not underpinned by, is its commercial funding structure. While its sale of advertising was a crucial part of the debates around Channel 4's organisation in the 1970s, and Channel 4 is keen to remind the readers of its corporate framework that its advertising is not a shareholder motivated venture, the language in the legislation around what Channel 4 should do for British broadcasting and the social purpose

with which it was charged is very much separate. There is a distinction, then, between Channel 4's public service remit and its need to reach broad enough audiences to gain enough advertising revenue to fund itself effectively. How, then, does Channel 4 organise itself in order to cater for these oppositional elements? Where is diversity and risk taking prioritised and where is the competition for ratings and the need to generate revenue prioritised? And finally, how are these two elements, representative of different areas of Channel 4, being differently characterised with discourses of cultural value?

### **Section Two: Creating Genre through Discourse and the Meaning of Entertainment**

Section Two of this thesis addresses how comedy is not only a prominent cultural category in the legislation of British broadcasting, but also a departmental category that is used to organise different formats of comedy programmes: sitcom, sketch comedy, stand-up and panel shows. This departmental organisation of comedy formats has also been shown to be a process of organising the distribution of creative worth and cultural value amongst those categories. This is seen in the talk around the creative work and creativity of those working in Channel 4 Comedy and Entertainment departments and the very different purposes of each department in relation to public service and reaching audiences. Firstly, this section introduces new outlines of how Entertainment is understood as a genre, which has had little attention as a category in television studies until now. This section does so by demonstrating how the structural organisation of Channel 4 and the language used to describe the work of these separate departments creates what genres mean entirely outside of the texts themselves. The Comedy and Entertainment departments, which were once combined but are now separate at Channel 4, are shown to be constructed by the interviewees as follows:

- Comedy commissions are talked about as: highly authored; having a 'truth'; expensive; divisive; misunderstood; alienated as a genre; the product of an unlearnable ability to be funny; enduring; reputational.
- Entertainment commissions are talked about as: broad; warm; a treat; the product

of a collaborative process; not 'mean' or 'offensive'; expensive; lucrative; not fulfilling Channel 4's public service remit; fleeting; ephemeral; immediate.

As such, using the distinction between public service and commercial funding as a way to distribute cultural value, the creative work and the programming of the Comedy Department is positioned as high in cultural value whereas Entertainment is low. This analysis also brings about new understanding as to how 'entertainment' is not only a description of a programme's purpose but a generic category in and of itself, which carries its own meaning and relation to discourses of creativity. As such we understand that this genre refers, at Channel 4, to programmes that do not pertain enough to the public service remit of the broadcaster, to occupy drama, comedy or documentary status. As such there are 'comedy' programmes that are high cultural status, which are under the Comedy Department and 'comedy' programmes that attract high audiences but are talked about with less reverence and are therefore constructed as low in cultural status, within the context of Channel 4's specific remit. As such Entertainment can be seen to be constructed within the landscape of generic categorisation as a term that represents the debates around popular culture more broadly and popular culture's battle with hierarchies of cultural value and legitimacy.

The opposition whereby the Comedy Department represents culturally valuable comedy where Entertainment represents that which is popular but not of equal cultural value, is also seen in the talk around the programming provided for Channel 4 by the Acquisitions Department. When the interviewees discuss the commissioning and programming of the Acquisitions Department, who also handle programmes defined under the 'comedy' category on the 4od web site, there is again a distinction between the high cultural value of Comedy and the low cultural value of comedy bought in from the US: imported comedy programmes are, according to the interviews, lacking in public service value but cheap to obtain and lucrative to broadcast. This is, then, a second category of comedy programming which is alienated from the work of the Channel 4 Comedy Department itself. Furthermore, television Comedy with a capital 'C' is constructed as high in cultural value and status within the institution of Channel 4 because of its claims to the broadcaster's public service remit as well as its production expense and commercial low yield. Elsewhere Entertainment and Acquisitions, while responsible for television categorised by Channel 4 in material for its audiences' attention as 'comedy', are instructionally constructed as being of low cultural

status in comparison: they are residual categories of television comedy, 'Other' comedy or simply 'not Comedy'.

This use of departmental categorisation reflects broader discourses associated with high and low culture and so television comedy more broadly is in a state of tension. On one hand, there is the suggestion that television comedy is constructed in society as a low culture commodity, a small time industry and as such one that is rarely interrogated as a cultural form. As Mills highlights in *The Television Genre Book*, "comedy's low cultural status has meant that academics coming from a humanities or literature background have often chosen to focus on more 'serious' concerns; comedy has always played second fiddle to tragedy" (Ed. Creeber, 2013: 74). Within the industry, this construction is present in the legislation's lack of celebratory language for the generic category of comedy in comparison to documentary, news and current affairs. Within Channel 4 as an institution but outside of comedy work itself, the genre is said, by the interview participants, to be thought of as too fun or light to be taken seriously, and consequentially, as a genre, there is an unstable environment for the Comedy Department. This instability creates an isolated and defensive sense of "fighting the corner of comedy", in terms of budgets and good time slots within the Channel 4 portfolio schedule. While these battles may well be perceived by all departments (although the Entertainment commissioners do not refer to the struggle to gain money and good time slots) the struggle for Comedy is related specifically to a perception that it has creative but less significant concerns such as how many swear words might be permitted in a sitcom episode or the surreal demands of *Noel Fielding's Luxury Comedy*.

At the same time, for those working in the Comedy and Entertainment Departments, sitcom and sketch shows are both reputational, enduring and aligned with discourses of high cultural value. In these interviews, the participants in commissioning state that Channel 4 Comedy projects should be able to reach a small but passionate audience without being threatened with decommissioning. The commissioners state that Comedy is at its creative best, of the highest quality and at its most valuable to Channel 4, when it is highly authored, when it has a clear creative voice and when it is allowed to become 'what it is meant to be' without the interference of those who don't understand what it is to make television comedy. In this sense and as seen by the comparisons made by interviewees to comedy formats that are the responsibility of the Entertainment Department (panel shows, stand-up comedy shows), television comedy at Channel 4 is constructed as having far greater cultural value. As such

this thesis looks to the more complicated interaction of value judgements, and how value is defined, within television Comedy work at, and for, Channel 4.

In the interviews, there are certainly moments of dismissive talk around Comedy, belittling it as a genre with respect to 'more serious' programming. But this happens, again, either as a reflection of the ways in which those working in Comedy feel *other* industry professionals belittle their work or how the genre is misunderstood by television audiences.

Nerys Evans talks about sitting in heads of department meetings, trying to argue for extra swear words in *The Inbetweeners*, while the *Dispatches* team are debating how to broadcast a documentary on war where people's lives are at stake. Shane Allen talks about how people don't take Comedy seriously "because of what it is". He also suggests that it is consequently more difficult to argue for good time slots and higher budgets because of the perception that Comedy matters less, stating that it's easier to argue for documentary and news coverage because of their perceived importance and therefore precedence in the schedule. So when Comedy commissioners describe how those outside of Comedy production perceive their department's work, it is through discourses of triviality and low culture. But within the direct talk of both Comedy commissioners and practitioners about their creative work, the language constructs the production process and the programmes themselves through discourses of high art and cultural value.

What this talk fails to construct is a sense of value around the generation of money through the "broad" or "warm" appeal of entertainment or the importing of American sitcoms. From the offset of Channel 4's remit to appeal to alternative audiences and its commercial funding structure, the balance of these lower culture, popular departments with higher valued reputational Comedy is not represented as complimentary but in fact oppositional for the channel.

### **Section Three: Creative Work and Cultural Value in Generic Labour Forces**

A further finding is in the distinction of what work bears greater claims to creativity within

Comedy production. It is through this process of inclusion and exclusion the value in the creative labour force itself is organised. There are several points to the construction of this distinction:

- Firstly, the distinction made is between those television professionals who understand comedy and those who don't.
- Comedy work is constructed by those who perform it as an isolated endeavour that cannot be understood by those outside of the genre, even if they work elsewhere in television.
- Those within the genre at commissioning level are said to be a better influence if they understand or 'get' Comedy, which is compounded specifically by bearing claim to writing experience.
- Writers describe their ability to write, not in terms of training or a learned skillset, but as something quite natural and spontaneous – even when degrees, night school and other training practices are elsewhere mentioned.
- The ability to write comedy – something that is funny – is separated from the learned process of television production, what is expected of writers and the "sharp end of writing".

As the final section of this thesis goes on to demonstrate, the talk around the authorship and creative voice that are individual to each comedy programme is bound by an emphasis on the role of the writer. This emphasis and the attribution of the creative voice entirely to their vision and design, privileging their input to the project's creativity above all other collaborative workers and outside influence, is one that is also intertwined with the intangible skillset of the comedy writer and the lack of concrete talk about the mechanics of making programmes funny. In this sense, the role of the comedy writer is constructed with the same creative reverence that a lot of cultural production of that which is considered high art is talked about. Talk around the learning process is either dismissive or simply absent in the interviews and thus any success in creating such cultural phenomena is the result primarily of creative exceptionality and the gift of the creative impulse. The television Comedy writer is understood, even with some elements of modesty, as having "personality characteristics [that] differ from those of the rest of the population as a whole" (Weisberg, 1986: 70). While there might be formal training processes undertaken by comedy writers, the ability to write the funny content that makes comedy a unique genre is not part of these processes.

I propose that this creates a myth of comic genius, which causes a lack of transparency for people in society who might otherwise consider this type of work an option. The construction firstly of the genius myth in relation to creative spontaneity, and secondly of creative skillsets as un-learnable and attributed to an innate talent or personality, can be seen as an active discourse around the work of television comedy writers. With the creative spontaneity that the comedy writer is constructed as 'author', the single driving creative force of a project, there is discourse of the *extraordinary* in relation to creative ability (Weisberg: 2006: 341). The link in the literature between the study of creativity and the study of genius is long standing, as highlighted in Hans Eysenck's *Genius: The Natural History of Creativity* (1995). But while this link is one that is often explained as cultural rather than natural, I look to the specific and negative consequences of stating that the creative individual is an extraordinary, gifted or exceptional individual. In terms of real world effects, the lack of transparency and the discourse of creative exceptionalism denies access to those from sectors of society that are affected by a lack of social mobility and as such are themselves not constructed as 'exceptional' or entitled to the status of 'exceptionalism' within society.

In terms of the comedy text I would argue that there is no static notion of what is or is not funny, as the audience's response is dependent on context. I also argue that creative and non-creative work, and as such the creative individual and the non-creative individual, are constructed through these discourses in a manner that is over-determined and falsely binary.

### **Further Research**

It could be argued that textual analyses of television programmes that construct narratives around television comedy would show where these discourses of comedy and creativity pass through the television text to audiences watching at home. After all, as the Comedy creatives all state, they were all first fans of television comedy before they were workers in the industry itself. We might then understand more of how the industry creates discourses about itself and its celebrated workforce through the narratives that it constructs of its own histories. The number of programmes that reflect on the making of television comedy, describing an

emotive affection with which sitcoms and sketch shows are said to be revered by audiences, such as *Channel 4's 30 Greatest Comedy Shows* (Channel 4, 2012) point to an ongoing construction of comedy as, in Shane Allen's words, a "reputational" genre. Television's telling of its own history on screen is an area that could provide a fruitful intersection between the discursive construction of television comedy within the industry and how it is performed for its audiences and potential future workforce.

Extending the poststructuralist position of this thesis, research into how audiences identify with television comedy work might be useful in examining the extent to which audiences might perceive reconstruct these discourses that, I argue, create barriers of access to creative work. This would then offer new insight into how discourses of creative worth and cultural value might manifest in audiences who are, by definition as consumers rather than producers, not able to create such discourses within the television text and are receptive to those produced by the industry. By using one site of analysis (production) to propose another (reception), new understanding of how texts are informed by industrial discourses and to what extent audiences are perceptive of or indeed reinterpret such constructions. As this thesis has shown, reflecting on different sites of discursive construction serves to reveal the complex and conflicting distribution of value that is operative at a number of levels.

For the study of comedy as a genre, however, I have examined talk around creativity in depth at the industrial, the institutional and the individual levels, as humour theory has not looked at the specifics of British television comedy at this sites of discourse before. As humour theory has tended to emphasise the subconscious operation of the joke (Mills, 2013: 75), in a way that's similar to how creativity theory has emphasised the subconscious operation of creative impulse "which many assume result from the action of unconscious thought processes" (Weisberg, 1986: 13), this thesis offers greater insight into how conscious talk, and the implicit construction of how comedy is creative, operates through a different level of unconsciousness: meaning through discourse.

This thesis finds that while Channel 4, as a creative institution, still constructs its cultural value as a broadcasting institution around diversity, risk and many characteristics included in the literature on defining creativity, the extent to which this is balanced with their commercial funding structure continues to position creativity and commerciality as diametrically opposed. Despite developments in cultural studies and in academic attention

to the financial advantages of the creative economy and environments necessary to support the creative industries, the contention of Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) that renders popular culture as mass produced, standardised and inherently destructive to society is still evident in the rhetoric around British television comedy forms. However this is not an opposition that I wish to reinforce and as such this is not a study that is critical of that which is constructed as 'popular' or as 'mass'. As evident in the analysis and with regards to Frith's assertions (1998) on the distribution of cultural value within popular culture this is a study concerned with more complex sites of distinction within popular culture phenomena and not the static division of cultural forms as either high or low.

### **Final Thoughts**

The criteria for the distinction between high and low culture, within the medium of television, is constructed through the language used to define generic categories in legislation and continues to be distinguished in light of each category's claims to public service or to its assumption of monetary worth within a free commercial market. As this process of inclusion and exclusion operates in the legislation, so does the distinction of what counts as the responsibility of the Channel 4 Comedy Department itself. This itself is an *organisational* construct of what is culturally valuable Comedy (authored, divisive, socially important, legitimate) under Channel 4's public service identity, where programme forms found under other departmental categories are constructed as broad, commercial or ephemeral and consequently as not Comedy at all. It is not necessarily the mere naming of Comedy as sitcom and sketch programmes as that which pertains to discourses of cultural value, but how the departments themselves distinguish between denotations of cultural value, and in doing so reproduce notions of quality comedy formats.

So while this thesis is still concerned with the construction of cultural hierarchies within creative production and within the organising of textual formats themselves, it pertains to the regard of television as a popular medium. However it does not position television as in any way universally without value, destructive or dangerous as Adorno and Horkheimer might have it. Instead it looks at the application of such discourses of value to certain generic

categories within this pop culture form as essentially arbitrary, and suggests that while there are uses in all programme forms in this analysis, the notion of value is a way of making distinctions that pertain to the discourse of creativity as oppositional to commercialism.

What it does criticise through this analysis is the limitations of generic classification as a textual endeavour, as the distinctions of value made around what the types of content of these programmes *do* or what they are *for* cannot be perceived within the text. To perform such a textual analysis would be, as a researcher, to design my own distinctions of cultural value rather than investigate industry discourses.

With regard to genre, then, it is not only the understanding of these categories that *creates* value distinctions but these value distinctions that *create* these texts and delineate how they are categorised. As such this study is underpinned by Derrida's criticism in his essay *The Law of Genre* of the traditional notions of genre as textual and thus a restrictive understanding of cultural categorisation. By expanding upon Jason Mittel's use of Foucault's discursive formations methodology this thesis interrogates the process of inclusion and exclusion that underpins traditional genre theory. I take the position of analysing genre outlined by Mittel, of doing so "not through interpretive readings or deep structural analysis, but in their surface manifestations and common articulations" (2004: 13). I approach this investigation of comedy, not through the analysis of textual components but by looking instead to how legislative and institutional discourses construct genre through talk around creativity and creative value.

This thesis notes where, within the comedy industry, the notion of cultural value is used to celebrate the genre's public service contribution. However, within this rhetoric of creative worth and the understanding of what makes certain Comedy projects successful, important or valuable, the question of who gets to construct such rhetoric and who gets to make television Comedy is thrown into light.

It is perhaps predictable that those commissioning at Channel 4 Comedy would make distinctions of value in order to justify their projects, as that is what Channel 4 does as a broadcaster: it releases reports, creates new charters and publicly advertises its cultural value based on the parameters of its public service remit to satisfy both audiences and its regulator Ofcom. If the output of the Comedy Department is reflective of the broadcaster's remit, then

the use of discourses around creativity that relate to traditions of high cultural value and status and that construct a spectacular creative talent in its authors reaffirms that this is a department that is charged with being reflective of this public service remit. However, in doing so it is also one that reconstructs the hierarchical practice of value distinction based on a notion of high and low culture.

Bahktin's use of the notion of *carnivalesque* celebrates the status-less-ness of comedy forms and its functional rejection, or at least subversion, of social hierarchies. As Tom Sobshack describes in his analysis of the carnivalesque in the British comedy text of the 1960s, "though some critics insist that such [carnivalesque] works merely vent society's frustrations, Bakhtin believes they not only liberated the human spirit, but eventually led to profound social change" (1996: 179). Mills, highlighting the analyses of Lipman (1991) and Jenkins (1994) on the subversive abilities of comedy forms, argues for the ways in which television comedy has been representative of the Bakhtinian by "bringing people together to ridicule and mock institutions, such as the church and governments, which constrain and control everyday behaviour" (2009: 122). Whether comedy texts might be a real site of political and social revolt or a containable cathartic demonstration of the revolutionary, one of the social uses of the comedy, then, resides in its resistance to high cultural status, without which it could not be at all subversive, anarchic or *carnivalesque*.

So what, then, of the discourse of high cultural value that operates around Channel 4 Comedy? Can this department operate with creative risk, innovation and progressiveness if it relies on the rhetoric of cultural value to justify its output which is understood to be reconstructive of social distinctions that have (re)produced divisions of access and availability to creative and cultural work?

When looking at the discourse that constructs what it is to create content for Channel 4's Entertainment Department, there is no such impetus placed on the creative worth of its work: it is, within such a cultural hierarchy as I describe, distinctly low culture as I have described. However, is it the case that devoid of the discourses of value that construct Comedy commissions, Channel 4's anti-hierarchical anarchic playground is in fact rooted in its most controversial genre department, given that Entertainment does not serve the broadcaster's remit under which its notion of public service is defined. Entertainment as a genre, framed in this sense, perhaps requires further interrogation, to which this thesis

serves as a starting point.

For Comedy, if the onus is placed on the work of Comedy writers through discourses of artistry and creative exceptionality and this loads such work with being aspirational, then social identities that are constructed as having diminished access to aspirational work will not associate themselves with that creative work. In order to pursue diversity in the Comedy Department, Channel's negotiation of Comedy as reputational and of high cultural status in comparison to other Channel 4 departments reconstructs the genius myth that way-lays the rejection of such hierarchies. It is the lack of specificity of discourses around creative work that continues to foster a sense of exceptionality in creative work and forms a barrier between potential creative labour forces and the skillsets and opportunities that would make individuals well suited to the practical measures proposed in Channel 4's 360° Diversity Charter.

The idea of breaking down the hierarchies of access to cultural work in British broadcasting is central to Channel 4's remit to increase and encourage diversity in television production, both on and off screen. However, it is my contention that the status of high cultural value constructed by those in the Comedy Department itself, around Comedy work, is necessarily reconstructive of social and cultural hierarchies. Therefore, while Comedy might still be constructed as a site of play, fun and a lack of seriousness for the purposes of providing its generic pleasures of laughter and light entertainment, the discourse that elevates the genre to high cultural status within the generic department itself is problematic for the deconstruction of the hierarchies that maintain a lack of diversity in creative industries.

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# Appendix

## List of Contributors

It is again with many sincere thanks to the following participants that I have been able to conduct this research.

### **Shane Allen – Head of Channel 4 Comedy 2009 – 2012**

Before joining Channel 4 Comedy commissioning, Allen worked across broadcasters as a producer, director and writer of television comedy. His credits include *The 11 O'Clock Show* (1998 – 2000), *Shooting Stars* (1993 – 2011), *Da Ali G Show* (Channel 4, 2000) and *Brass Eye* (Channel 4, 1997 – 2001).

He came to be commissioning editor at Channel 4 Comedy in 2005, before becoming Head of Comedy in 2009 where the programmes he oversaw included *Facejacker* (Channel 4, 2010 - ), *Friday Night Dinner* (Channel 4, 2011), *Charlie Brooker's Black Mirror* (Channel 4, 2011 - ) and sketch show *Cardinal Burns* (E4 and Channel 4, 2012 - ). He was also executive producer on *The Inbetweeners Movie* (2011) and created 4Funnies, a scheme encouraging short sketches from brand new comedy talent.

In 2012, Allen moved to the BBC to become Head of Comedy, the position he holds at the time of writing.

### **Sam Bain – Television Comedy Writer**

The son of TV director Bill Bain and sitcom actress Rosemary Frankau, Bain attended St. Paul's School and gained his Master's degree in Creative Writing from the University of Manchester where he met his long term comedy writing partner Jesse Armstrong.

Before starting writing Channel 4's longest running sitcom *Peep Show* (2003 - ), Bain and Armstrong collaborated on children's series *The Queen's Nose* (BBC One, 1995 – 2003),

sketch show *Smack the Pony* (Channel 4, 1999 – 2003) and children's comedy *My Parents are Aliens* (ITV, 1999 – 2006).

Bain and Armstrong have collaborated on BBC One sitcom *The Old Guys* (2009 – 2010) and E4 comedy drama *Fresh Meat* (2011), Channel 4 pilot *Bad Sugar* (2012), as well as working on Radio Four sketch show *That Mitchell and Webb Sound* (2003 –) and two feature films *The Magicians* (2007) and *Four Lions* (2010).

### **Tom Beck – Commissioning Editor at Channel 4 Entertainment 2012-2014**

Starting out in production, Tom Beck had extensive experience in entertainment, working on *The Big Breakfast* (Channel 4, 1992-2002), *Make My Day* (Channel 4, 2002) and *The Richard Taylor Interviews* (Channel 4: 2003) and working as Series Producer on *The Friday Night Project* (Channel 4, 2005 – 2008), *Lily Allen and Friends* (BBC Three, 2008) and *Chris Moyles' Quiz Night* (Channel 4, 2009 – 2012).

Before joining Channel 4, Tom Beck was the Head of Entertainment at Gallowgate, the production company owned by entertainment stars Ant and Dec, where he developed and produced series one and two of *Ant and Dec's Push the Button* (ITV, 2010-2011).

On joining Channel 4 Entertainment in March of 2012, Beck worked on Derren Brown's specials (Channel 4, 2000- ), *Alan Carr: Chatty Man* (Channel 4, 2009 - ), *10 O'Clock Live* (Channel 4, 2011 – 2013) and *The Jump* (Channel 4, 2014 - ).

Beck has since moved across to become a commissioning editor for Channel 4's Factual Entertainment Department where he still works at the time of writing.

### **Paul Doolan – Television comedy writer**

Before becoming a writer of television comedy, Doolan worked at production company Roughcut. At Roughcut he became involved with the ground floor development of now record-breaking Sky sitcom *Trollied* (2011 - ) on which he is credited as creator and writer.

Elsewhere his key writing credits include working on BBC sitcom *Clone* (2008), ensemble sketch show *Man Stroke Woman* (BBC, 2005-2007) and sketch show *Anna and Katy* (Channel 4, 2011 – 2013), and additional material on *Cardinal Burns* (Channel 4, 2011 – 2013), *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* (1996 -) and *The Armstrong and Miller Show* (2007 - ).

### **Andrew Ellard – Television comedy script editor and writer**

After blogging and writing articles on television and film Ellard got picked up to contribute to online content for the BBC's *Red Dwarf* (BBC Two, 1988-1999; Dave, 2009-2012), where he became a script editor. After Graham Linehan found his notes online about his Channel 4 sitcom *The I.T. Crowd* (2006-2013), Ellard was hired to script edit there too.

His expansive portfolio reaches across British broadcasters, working on the *Life of Riley* (BBC, 2009-2011), *The Midnight Beast* (E4, 2009 - ), *Miranda* (BBC, 2009-2014), *Count Arthur Strong* (BBC, 2013-2015) and *Vic and Bob's House of Fools* (BBC, 2014 - ).

Ellard's first feature film as writer, *Afterdeath* was released in 2015.

### **Nerys Evans – Deputy Head of Comedy at Channel 4**

Prior to working in Channel 4 Comedy commissioning Evans worked as a producer on a number of high profile comedies across broadcasters including *Comic Relief* (BBC One, 2005-2007), *A Bucket o' French and Saunders* (BBC, 2007), *The Life and Times of Vivienne Vyle* (BBC 2, 2007), *Jam and Jarusalem* (BBC One, 2006-2009), *Jonathan Creek* (BBC One, 1997 – 2014) and *Miranda* (BBC 2, BBC One, 2009 – 2013). She was also production secretary on *Little Britain* (BBC Three, BBC One, 2003-2006) and was associate script supervisor on *The Inbetweeners Movie* released in 2012.

Having been a commissioning editor at Channel 4 Comedy, Evans served as acting Head of Comedy until Phil Clarke was appointed the top role in 2012, and Evans was made Deputy Head of the department.

Whilst at Channel 4 she's been central to commissioning programmes such as *Phone Shop* (2010 - ), *Noel Fielding's Luxury Comedy* (2012 - ), *Man Down* (2013 - ) and *The Midnight Beast* and remains in the position of Deputy Head of the department at the time of writing.

### **Justin Gorman – Head of Channel 4 Entertainment**

Working first as a researcher and independent producer in television for Action Time, Granada, Hat Trick and Princess Productions, Gorman's work in entertainment defines his early production career. His production credits are broad, including *Blind Date* (ITV, 1985-2001), *Popstars* (ITV, 2001), *Back to Reality* (Channel 5, 2004), *Model Behaviour* (Channel 4, 2001-2002) and *The Real Hustle* (BBC Three, 2006-2012), before heading to Channel 4 he worked on *The Cube* (2009 -), a game show initially developed for Channel 4 which ultimately was broadcast on ITV1.

When Head of Entertainment and Comedy at Channel 4 Andrew Newman left the broadcaster to become head of production company Objective, Gorman, then the existing head of Objective Gorman became the head of the new autonomous Entertainment Department at Channel 4 in January of 2010. At the time he was working as executive producer on Channel 4 Entertainment commission Derren Brown's specials under Objective which he continued to oversee.

Since being at Channel 4, Gorman has overseen the commissioning of *The Million Pound Drop* (Channel 4, 2010 - ), *Stand up to Cancer* (Channel 4, 2012), *The Jump* and the move of *The Last Leg* (Channel 4, 2012 -), initially a Creative Diversity Department commission, to the watch of the Entertainment Department.

### **David Mitchell – Television comedy actor, writer, broadcaster**

Former president of the Cambridge Footlights society, Mitchell started performing at the Edinburgh fringe with fellow Cambridge graduate and writing partner Robert Webb.

Mitchell and Webb have written and starred together on a number of BBC television radio commissioners, including *Bruiser* (BBC Two, 2000), *The Mitchell and Webb Situation* (Play UK, 2001), *That Mitchell and Webb Sound* (BBC Radio 4, 2003-2012) and *That Mitchell and Webb Look* (BBC Two, 2006-2010).

Mitchell has starred with Webb in Channel 4's longest running sitcom *Peep Show*, which, as stated above, is airing its last series this year, 2015.

Elsewhere Mitchell has been a key writer or contributor on shows *Armstrong and Miller* (Paramount Comedy Channel, Channel 4, 1997-2001), *Big Train* (BBC Two, 1998-2002), his own online series *David Mitchell's Soap Box* (distributed by the *Guardian*, 2009-2012) and *10 O'Clock Live* (Channel 4, 2011-2013) on which he starred. He and Webb starred together

on *The Bleak Old Shop of Stuff* (BBC Two, 2011 - ), the Bain and Armstrong comedy drama *The Ambassadors* (BBC Two, 2013) and their film *The Magicians*.

He is also a regular guest on a number of television comedy panel shows, as a team captain on *Would I Lie to You?* (BBC One, 2007 - ) and hosting *Was it Something I Said?* (Channel 4, 2013).

As a final note, despite the inevitably critical comments I incited in my questioning, I would like also to acknowledge the affection and appreciation each of the participants expressed for British television Comedy and for Channel 4's role in its history and present health. I asked each participant, at the end of their interview, to name their favourite Channel 4 Comedy and despite some attempts to list more than one, the overwhelming favourite was *Father Ted* (Channel 4, 1995-1998). Except for Sam Bain who said *Peep Show*. Although in his defence, he didn't say it was the best, just his favourite.