Twin Constellations: Parallelism and Stance in Stand-Up Comedy

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This essay is located at the triple intersection between: 1) linguistic anthropological studies on poetic or tropic language use (for example, Silverstein 2004; Agha 1997); 2) performance theoretical folkloristics (for example, Briggs 1988; Bauman and Briggs 1990); and 3) humor studies dealing with the phenomena of analogy and irony (for a broad overview, see Attardo 1994). As I hope to demonstrate, parallelism, "repetition with patterned variation" (Brown 1999:224), is a concept that penetrates all three of these areas. Regarding the first field, Roman Jakobson (1960) expounded parallelism as manifesting the poetic function of language, as the poetic use of language par excellence. A staple feature of various genres of verbal art and folklore (see Frog 2014a; Fox 1977), parallelism is also a basic structural principle in conversational and co-constructed discourse (for example, Silverstein 1985; Glick 2012). Regarding the second area, the natural habitat of parallel forms and structures is the communicative and cultural context of (ritualized) performance and social interaction, which regularly foreground enactment of the poetic function (Bauman 1984; Reyes 2002). Finally, regarding analogy and irony in humor studies, the focus here is on uses of parallelism in comic routines, and a relationship between analogical parallelism and a specific type of ironic effect.

The generic context and materials for my analysis are drawn from stand-up comedy routines. Stand-up comedy is a genre of oral performance that has emerged internationally from the twin traditions of American vaudeville and European music hall during the mid-1900s (Nesteroff 2015; Double 2014 [2005]). Founded on the emulation of spontaneous conversation in an artificial performance setting, stand-up comedy revolves around what Colleary (2015, Chapter 2) has designated as comic stylization of individual persona. Individual comic persona, arguably the most important tool for a stand-up comic, is produced and stylized to a high degree through various stances and viewpoints, illustrating the combative, manifestly confrontational nature of the genre.

Routines are formally and thematically delimited comic "numbers" or units of complete stand-up performances (see Lindfors 2016; Brodie 2008:160-69). As texts, stand-up routines are highly variable in their internal structure as well as their pragmatic placing in performances. According to the conventions of stand-up, routines are stylized and presented as a (unilateral) dialogue between the comic and the audience, conventionally underscoring the contextualized situatedness and momentariness of the performance (see Brodie 2014). Not atypically, stand-up routines manifest a rich intertwining of sociolinguistic phenomena, poetically juxtaposed social positions, gestural enactments, layers of embedded reported speech, and incorporated sequences

of the comic performer assuming the voice and gestures of various persona. Recalling the Anglo-American narratological distinction between showing and telling (Booth 1969), stand-up could be construed as a mixture of mimetic, dramatic comedy constituted by play-acted enactments, and narrative, oratorical comedy (a distinction that echoes the Platonic dichotomy between mimesis and diegesis).

In what follows, I examine two routines by two contemporary comics, the British Stewart Lee and the American Hari Kondabolu. Both performances illustrate the significance of parallelism as a stock-in-trade poetic technique of verbal comedy, but each does so in different ways. On the one hand, the prominently stylized routine performed by Lee verges on the oratorical: the analogical parallelisms of his performance emerge across formally delineated and sequentially positioned discursive segments. By contrast, Kondabolu's routine highlights parallelism as a higher-order configuration that is closely aligned with the dialogic acts of stance-taking and positioning. Indeed, I advocate for an eclectic approach to the topic of parallelism as a flexible analytic tool. In this regard, a heuristic distinction is made between 1) an approach to parallelism as a textual and rhetorical device based on sequential repetition (alongside alliteration, rhyme, and so on), and 2) a more "positional" or symbolic orientation toward parallelism as a higher-order structural and functional principle.

The concept of "stance" is invoked in both analyses. Stance-taking, which can be marked verbally as well as by body posture, facial expression, and gesture (Matoesian 2005:168), is elemental in how we (that is to say, speakers of a common language) assign value to objects of interest. By assuming stances we also position ourselves with regard to the "stance objects," align or realign with other subjects, and simultaneously invoke or mobilize presupposed systems of sociocultural value (Du Bois 2007:139, 143, 169). As illustrated below, stance-taking acts are readily perceived as ubiquitous, even obligatory, in stand-up performances, they frequently invoke shared stance objects and appeals for various stances, not least in the hope of engendering a sense of community. To foreshadow my analyses, recall that Du Bois (*ibid*.:141, 149-50) notes how stance-taking acts typically invoke and respond to a "counterstance" attributed to another position, and are inherently suitable for creating structural parallelisms. That is to say, certain stances themselves, for instance those perceived to be harmful or discriminatory, often become objects for subsequent stance acts that may repudiate or oppose them (see also Jaffe 2009).

Difference and Repetition

Jakobson (1960) designated the poetic function of language as basically the text indexing itself. Poetics refers to the universally applicable principle by which phonetically, grammatically, semantically, rhythmically, or otherwise functionally covalent or oppositional syllables, words, motifs and patterns, or narrative sequences and themes are juxtaposed within a text (Pressman 1994:471; Glick 2012:344-45). To recognize such covalent units of expression requires certain formal instruction, some form of sequential "metricality" or a diagram of utterance-internal contextualization (Agha 1997:469). The most elemental sign for analyzing the linear signal is a simple pause that functions to constitute the sequential measure (meter) in both explicitly poetic and prosaic genres.

"Metricality," in this general sense, is palpably recognizable in stand-up, typically constituted and marked by pauses, expletives, prosody (accent, intonation), and other paralinguistic features rather than by strict metric (syllabic, phonetic, and so forth) rules per se. Superficially stylized as conversational, an ostensibly free flow of discourse, stand-up as discursive production is to a high degree structurally constrained rhythmically and interactionally, proceeding through sequential chunks of discourse (ideally) partitioned by laughter. In the context of stand-up, "metricality" is more broadly seen as participating in the general ritualization of discursive interaction. Ritualization being understood here as the delimitation of (privileged, sacred) spaces through synchronized verbal, nonverbal, and choreographic coordination (Silverstein 2004:626; Stasch 2011:160-62). As a genre, stand-up is unique in that the process of ritualization is further marked, even co-produced, by the performer and the audience together, audience laughter being a prominent signal for cutting up or ending a textual or performative sequence.

Parallelism, finally, is a highly productive manifestation of poetics in which the recurrently patterned verbal and non-verbal signs (repetition) are accompanied by systematic variation (difference). Such equivalent patterns are rendered meaningful in a mutually entailing, emergent fashion that may be synonymic, antonymic, paraphrastic, analogical, cumulative, comic, and so on.[1] As "wholly emergent type of information that reflexively shapes the construal of behavior while the behavior is still under way" (Agha 2007:24-25), parallelisms are construable solely in their textual surroundings.

Though my analyses are mainly concerned with parallelism as represented by smaller-scale (co-textual) reflexivity, based on equivalences among chunks of linearly unfolding speech, parallelism can also be constitutive in producing higher-order distinctions in terms of whole genres. As Fleming and Lempert (2014:488) explain, "as it draws attention to message form over larger stretches of discourse, parallelism can also, at a higher order, help put the whole event-in-progress in sharp relief, like a gestalt erupting from the background of 'ordinary' communication." That is to say, not only does parallelism bind together sequences of a single stand-up routine, thus heightening its coherence, it can also help constitute the genre of stand-up on a higher level insofar as successive routines in performance may come to resemble and parallel each other in their textual organization (compare this with instances of "canonical parallelism", Fox 1977).

Understood as a *set of relations* between units of utterance (Wilce 2009:34; Frog 2014b), parallelism constitutes an expansive and inclusive field of study, analytically operationalized with regard to the empirical cases at hand. After all, parallelism is quite a different beast to tame

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[1] Parallelism is no stranger to the study of humor and comedy. Both parallelism and analogy have been included in the "logical mechanisms" that prominent humor theorists Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin (1991) have recognized as constitutive of jokes. In their survey and taxonomy of "all known logical mechanisms," Attardo et al. (2002) present as many as 27 such mechanisms, including (false) analogy, (implicit) parallelism, proportion, and juxtaposition, the distinctions and relations between which remain, however, not entirely clear. For instance, proportion—a relates to b as c relates to d, or a:b::c:d—is described as a "special kind of parallelism," essentially a double parallelism, only to be rephrased in the next instance as "analogy relations" (Attardo et al. 2002:12-13). Similarly, repetition in general is a long since identified and well-documented phenomenon in the study of humor (for example, Freud 1960; also Zupančič 2008). Repetition was already isolated by Henri Bergson (1935 [1914]) as one of the three universal processes of humor, the other two being inversion and reciprocal interference of series ("equivocal situations"), respectively.

in the context of strictly regimented oral poetry such as kalevalaic epics (entailing "canonical parallelism"; Fox 1977) or in the context of casual conversational interaction. As a preface to the following sections, I designate two methodological orientations to parallelism. However, straddling methodological boundaries, in other words combining different orientations, often produces the most interesting results.

1) The study of poetics, under the aegis of folkloristics or linguistic anthropology, typically identifies parallelism as formally delineated, sequentially positioned repetition of textual or linguistic units (for example, Frog 2014a; Glick 2007 and 2012; and Lindfors 2017). This textual approach traditionally categorizes parallelism as one conventional poetic or rhetorical device among others, placing the emphasis on sequential repetition of co-textual units. Grasping the "differential" that is felt to exist between recurring sign patterns furthermore implies some measure of reflexivity on part of the audience. This means that poetic parallelisms are ultimately "hailed into existence" by acts of interpretative construal, potentially without license from the author of the text (see Lempert 2014:381; Nakassis 2013). Interestingly, by implicating equivalences across sequences or units of utterance while simultaneously leaving their relations vague—omitting connectors, interactional premises, and so forth—parallelism builds on meaningful non-occurrence of communication, i.e. the principle of non-communication (Vesala and Knuuttila 2012:4-5). As is noted below, the poetic figuration of specifically analogical parallelisms is particularly compatible with irony, which generally plays off on mutually contrasting stances (see also Fernandez and Huber 2001:10-11). This approach is foregrounded in my analysis of Stewart Lee's routine.

2) In positionally or symbolically oriented approaches, by contrast, parallelism is generally conceptualized as a structural or functional principle (for example, Wilce 2008; Du Bois 2007). By my reckoning, this approach understands parallelism as a specifically dualistic configuration of structural or functional elements, downplaying the sequential aspects of parallelism. It identifies parallelism as mutually entailing social or cultural *positions* or higher-order (symbolic) *phenomena*. Frog ("Parallelism Dynamics I," this volume) distinguishes a similar form as parallelism on the level of symbolic articulation. The level of symbolic articulation represents a secondary order of signification, as Frog explains, whereas the primary order of verbalization functions as the mode mediating the articulation of symbolic phenomena or cultural positions. This approach, supplemented by positional and spatial analysis, is foregrounded in my study of Hari Kondabolu's routine.

Finally, in my conclusion, I aim at collapsing the boundary between these two types of parallelism and, ultimately, bring them together. I suggest that both types fundamentally rely on iconic mappings across co-textual signs. The main difference between them is the degree of their formal stylization and simultaneous decontextualization from the ongoing interactional event.

Analogical Parallelism and Irony: Stewart Lee

The first example, from the contemporary British stand-up comedian Stewart Lee, is instructive for illustrating the implications of my introductory discussion. The clip is extracted from the fourth episode of his BBC2 series *Stewart Lee's Comedy Vehicle* (Lee 2009), titled

"Credit Crunch." After about half-way through the episode (beginning at 18:38), nominally revolving around issues of the global financial crisis, Lee offers the following diagnosis in his trademark languid, deadpan voice:

Stewart Lee's Financial Crisis[2]

1a	basically
1b	what's happened is somewhere
1c	along the line
1d	as a society
1e	we confused
1f	the notion of home
1g	with the possibility
1h	of an investment opportunity
2a	what kind of creature
2b	wants to live
2c	in an investment opportunity?
2d	[lowers voice] only man… [random, singular laughs]
3a	[raises voice slightly] the fox has his den [scattered laughs]
3b	the *bee* . . .
3c	has his hive [scattered laughs]
3d	the stoat... umm
3e	has a… stoat… -hole [L]
4a	[raises voice] but only man ladies and gentlemen
4b	the worst animal of all
4c	chooses to make his nest
4d	in an investment opportunity [L]
5a	[higher pitch; addresses the camera directly] "mmm
5b	snuggle down in the lovely credit! [scattered laughs]
5c	ooh all warm
5d	in the mortgage payment
5e	mmm!"
6a	but home

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[2] The following typographical conventions have been adopted for the transcriptions:
[L]: laughter of the audience;
italic font: speaker emphasizing the words;
" ": characterizations, variations of the tone of voice;
[ ]: gestures or movements of the performer, additional information;
line shifts: ending of a sentence/pause/rhythms of speech.

6b   is not the same thing as an investment opportunity

6c   home is a basic requirement of life…

6d   like food

7a   when a hamster

7b   hides hamster food in his hamster cheeks

7c   he doesn't keep it there in the hope that it'll rise in value [scattered laughs]

7d   and when a squirrel hides a nut

7e   he's not trying to play the acorn market [L]

7f   and having eaten the nut

7g   he doesn't keep the shell

7h   in the hope of setting up a lucrative sideline making tiny hats for elves [L]

7i   and when a dog buries a bone he doesn't keep that bone buried

7j   until the point where it's reached its maximum market value

7k   he digs it up when he's hungry

8a   and if estate agents were dogs burying bones

8b   not only

8c   would they leave those bones buried until they'd reached their maximum market value

8d   but they would run around, starting rumors about imminent increases in the price of
            bones [L]

8e   in the hope of driving up the market

8f   and they'd

8g   invite loads of boneless dogs to all view the bone at the same time [L]

8h   in the hope of giving the impression there was a massive demand for bones

8i   and they would photograph the bone in such a way as to make it look much more juicy
            than it really was [L]

8j   airbrushing out the maggots and cropping the rotten meat

The formatted transcript of the routine visually lays bare significant aspects of formal organization that regiment the performance (see Bauman 2012:104): there is an apparent sequential structure ("metricality") within the text. In what Charles Briggs (1988:348) has referred to as the "emergence of a metatextual focus," Lee's performance manifests a highly organized, prominently segmentable form with clearly definable thematic units and lines marked by intonation and pauses. The basic paralinguistic unit cutting the text into sequential lines is the pause, supplementing and accentuating the syntactic and thematic contours of the text.[3]

The dominant theme of the routine is initially condensed in the grounding metonymical trope of the text, "home is an investment." In the conceptual frame activated by the speaker (1f), homes as spatial locations with prototypically positive affective connotations are incongruent

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[3] In the terminology of poetry, the implementation of meaningful line breaks in visual transcription leads to enjambment, which typically serves to heighten the expressive properties of language, such as dramatic tension (compare Jones et al. 2011:31). Here, enjambment is naturally of my own doing, through which I wanted to visually highlight the metricalized procession of the speech.

with (the possibilities of) investment opportunities, prototypically indexing the affectively neutral, calculating economic jargon.[4]   The pejorative categorization of this trope as "confusion"simultaneously outlines the recurrent, opposing stances of the routine. First, the trope itself indexes a stance, which could be glossed as "economism" ("reduction of social facts to economic dimensions"), and second, Lee realigns himself by assuming a negative stance toward the economism trope. In particular, the economism stance is strategically attributed to "us" as a "society." Insofar as the participants in the speech event are mapped onto the categories of the denotational text (we, society) and positioned as culpable for the crisis, the routine takes on a tone of self-deprecation. Insofar as Lee is known to be politically liberal in his personal and professional life, the negative stance of the speaker is furthermore coherent.

The second segment confirms the negative stance of the speaker in the form of a rhetorical question (2a-2c). Rhetorical questions are by definition interactionally self-sufficient, indexically presupposing their entailments to be self-evident. An answer to Lee's question is, however, provided by an anaphoric rephrasing of "we" as "man," which dramatically abstracts the implications of the economism stance exponentially to the entire human race (2d). The historical trajectory constructed in the first segment is framed by a comparative grid on which man, a creature amongst others, is unique in his desire to "nest" in an investment opportunity.

The first proper laughs, and by causal implication, the first comic juxtaposition, emerge with line 3a. A thematic, semantic parallelism between the homes of men and various non-human animals and their abodes is made coherent by the preceding implication of man's creatureliness. The animals are introduced in a timeless present tense as generic specimen, as predominantly members of their species. They are deployed as emblems, essentialized icons indexing the very "naturalness" of their being (Silverstein 2004:632). Segments two and three are autonomous, lacking any lexical connectors that would explicitly indicate comparison or juxtaposition; indeed, the propositional content of the third segment by itself would not make much interactional, communicative sense.

The unexpected introduction of the animals is contrasted with the dominant trope of the text, elaborating it in a reciprocally reflexive fashion.[5] In terms of the stances being contrasted with each other, the seemingly natural and morally neutral behavior of animals reciprocally underlines the negative stance against (the "unnaturalness" of) treating homes as investments. The effect is also heightened by the idiomatic linguistic presentation of this behavior.[6]   The

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[4] Without a doubt, houses and condominiums are in general bought and sold as physical structures, whereas the quality of a home is customarily differentiated by an emotional connection of the individual to the place of residence and/or a sense or ideal of permanency.

[5] For "reciprocal reflexivity," in which the pragmatic effects of sign tokens are simultaneously reportable in contrasting metapragmatic descriptions, as the hallmark of tropic language use in general, see Agha (1997:462-63).

[6] Illustrating the rhetorical density of particularly stylized stand-up performances, one could take note of how the conventionalized phrasing of the lines, accompanied by anthropomorphic reference to singular animals with the third person "he," carries certain stylistic overtones of some other, vaguely identifiable linguistic register. This register could perhaps be identified as one deployed in nature documentaries or such, which obviously adds to the out-of-place, comic effect of the parallelism. One is left wondering if the third segment is in fact "footed" in the sense that Goffman (1981 Chapter Three) uses the term, if Lee is indeed the principal (the primary accountant) of these lines, or if he is merely animating the position and stance of some unidentified speaker. For the question of footing, see note 8.

schema of human-animal relations is mapped onto the poetically organized chunks of discourse that are understood as indexing each other. Furthermore, poetic patterning mediates between the propositional level of discourse (and concomitant opposing stances) and the interactional level of pragmatic meaning by "measuring" the information flow into comparable units and by allowing us to infer the "movement" from one (what is propositionally said) to the other (what it pragmatically meant) (see Reyes 2002:183-84; Lempert 2008; Silverstein 2004.). In addition to the metaphorical or analogical aspects of the parallelism, the third segment also functions metonymically by elaborating on the stance of economism from several perspectives.

The five lines (3a-3e) are parallelistically positioned against the preceding economism stance, and one should also note the cumulative parallelism in the third segment itself. The grammatical and syntactic parallelism between lines 3a-3e entails a semantic parallelism (Attardo et al. 2002:12), in which the third unit (the stoat and its "hole") lacks a conventionalized, idiomatic construction. This equivalence is coerced by the parallelisms: it is emergent as if by necessity (Wilce 2008:110; Glick 2007:298; also Glick 2012). Lee is also seen to be aware of and to play on this effect by ostensibly being "prompted" to it. Functioning as an explicit metapragmatic response to the cumulative analogy, the laughter of the audience builds in volume toward the climax of the triple parallelism, unmistakably revealing the uptake of the parallelistic effect.

The dominant stance of economism is mimetically enacted in the fourth segment.[7] Lee "voices" (Bakhtin 1981) an arguably imaginary, deanthropomorphic character that indexes the social, and in this case species-related, position of a human. The segment is not explicitly framed as reported speech, but, rather, is foregrounded by a marked shift in prosody and voice quality (see Holt 2007 for similar examples of enactments in what she terms "joking scenarios").[8] The mimetic sequence (5a-5e) blends the notions of man and animal in a way that the former comes to "nest" in his "investment", investment being metonymically represented by credit and mortgage payment (for an influential treatment of cognitive blends, see Fauconnier and Turner 2002). The prosodic and intonational qualities as well as the affective expletives (5a, 5e) of the voiced figure are construed as indexing animalistic or child-like behavior: the affective expletives (5a, 5e) seem especially appropriate for this human-animal hybrid. While the multi-voiced figure is portrayed as blissfully ignorant of the implications of his predicament, the actual propositional and affective content of the comic's lines ironically enacts the tragicomedy of reducing homes to investments. Needless to say, the evaluative stance projected onto Lee himself with regard to the play-acted character is a negative one. Lee stresses the dramatic irony of the mimetic sequence by simultaneously addressing the camera. It is as if he is directing his words at "us humans," verbally indexed through "the viewers at home." The participants in the speech event (performer and audience *in situ* and at home) are collectively anchored to this human-animal hybrid, and the mocking irony targets all of them in self-deprecating fashion.

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[7] For such "instant characters" in stand-up, see Double (2014 [2005]:393-408).

[8] Manifesting a prominent shift of footing, the fifth play-acted segment also positionally parallels the third segment. In this, it can be seen as anaphorically implying that the third segment was also, indeed, "footed" in the sense that Lee primarily animated the stance of another speaker.

With respect to what she terms "moral irony" as a form of stance-taking strategy that indirectly indexes "shared community values," Robin Shoaps (2009:92-93; compare Lindfors forthcoming) underscores the dimensions of the speaker's role or the "production format." She contends that the role of principal—the person responsible for the stance expressed in the message, its primary accountant (Goffman 1981:144-45)—for the moral position taken through irony is not necessarily attributable to the speaker. In moral irony the negative evaluation can be strategically directed at the imagined stance or position of an indexed principal, rather than the actual words of known persons (Shoaps 2009:108). In Lee's routine, the negative evaluation is similarly directed at an unnamed or vague principal responsible for the stance of economism. Further still, this deliberately generic principal (us, society, man) is set in opposition with the "shared values" invoked through animals in the sense that the latter here represent the natural and good life. The shared values and norms invoked are not norms about language use in context, but "rather about the appropriateness of particular stances with respect to a realm of the 'ought' and 'should'" (*ibid.*). By opting for an indirect parallelistic construction in which the unadulterated "facts of nature" vindicate the negative stance directed at economism, Lee essentially manages to invoke an authority (shared values) surpassing his own. The moral authority of shared values, in addition to the fact that irony by its nature necessitates active interpretative work on the part of the audience, grants the irony with social and rhetorical power.

Segments 6-8 expand the analogical-indexical network of equivalences by building on the collocation *food and shelter*. The social logic of the routine is further complicated by the introduction of the figure of an estate agent, counterfactually compared with a dog burying his bones. Revealing as they are from the perspective of analogical blending, these segments merely elaborate on the already-established poetic configuration. I leave their closer analysis for another occasion.

Parallelism as Positional Spatialization: Hari Kondabolu

My second example is from a YouTube clip by the New York comedian Hari Kondabolu (see also Krefting 2014:196-230). The performance was documented on the BBC2 program (at the time BBC3) *Russell Howard's Good News*, a comedy and topical news show that mixes stand-up, sketches, and guest appearances by media personalities.[9] A relative newcomer to stand-up, Kondabolu is of Indian-American descent, and he routinely addresses such topics as racism and environmental and human rights issues in his comedy. In contrast to Lee's highly oratorical stylized performance, Kondabolu's routine about everyday racism is distinctively conversational. My transcription records the beginning of his performance. On the video recording it is preceded only by the inaugurating presentation by the host, Russell Howard, and the opening greetings from Kondabolu himself. The transcription cuts before Kondabolu reaches the reflexively framed ending bit of his routine; the transcription thus represents the first half of the complete routine:

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[9] See Kondabolu (2011), "Hari Kondabolu on Russell Howard's Good News." As of April 4, 2015, the video has garnered more than 470,000 views. My transcription starts at about 25 seconds into the video clip and ends around 2:15.

Hari Kondabolu's White Chocolate Joke

1a   it's very strange
1b   to be an American
1c   in the UK
1d   mmm, because in America
1e   I'm not always "*an American*"
1f   when people come up to me they usually say:
1g   "hey man,
1h   where're you from?" [L]
1i   and I tell them:
1j   "I'm from New York City"
1k   and then they're like:
1l   "no I mean,
1m   where are you *really from*?" [L]
1n   which of course is code for:
1o   "no I mean:
1p   [suspiciously] why aren't you white?" [L]

2a   which is offensive right?
2b   I'm being judged based on the color of my skin
2c   and not by my most important qualities
2d   which of course
2f   are the softness
2g   and smoothness
2h   *of my skin* [L]
2i   traits I have carefully cultivated
2j   with the extensive use
2k   of cocoa butter [L]

3a   yes friends:
3b   Hari Kondabolu uses cocoa butter
3c   I use cocoa butter because it makes me smell like *chocolate*
3d   and I love chocolate
3e   [retains seriousness] for political reasons [L]

4a   no cause you see
4b   in America
4c   an American is assumed to be white
4d   unless otherwise specified
4e   and that's why I like chocolate
4f   because when you first think of chocolate
4g   you think of something brown

4h   [laughingly] and if you think of white chocolate first well
4i   [contentiously] then you're a fucking racist [L]

5a   honestly who thinks of white chocolate in that situation?
5b   and that brings up the bigger issue
5c   why did we need white chocolate to begin with?
5d   what was wrong with chocolate exactly
5e   it's chocolate—
5f   it's great
5g   why would you need to make white chocolate?

6a   [significantly lowers his voice, talks downwards] "do you love the taste of chocolate
6b   but can't stand looking at it?
6c   [resumes an upward position, presents an imaginary chocolate bar] well then try some
             white chocolate!
6d   it's from the people that brought you *white Jesus . . .*" [L]

By focusing on the text's construction around various positions and the stances taken or implied about those positions, I uncover the recurring structural-functional configuration (parallelism) behind its interactional, rhetorical, and comic effects. Positioning refers to the process of discursive, dialogical identification, in general implicating a spatial approach to the nature of the self and identity (Hermans 2001:249). According to the narrative psychologist Hubert J. M. Hermans (2001; Hermans and Dimaggio 2007), it is a basic technique of identification for speakers to discursively draw on both internal positions (aspects of oneself) and external positions ("my friend John", "people") so as to simultaneously self-position themselves. The external voices can be more or less imaginary, closely intertwined with certain identifiable "actual" others, or as in the present case, unrecognizable, fuzzy, and generic ("people," "we," "the Americans," "you") (Hermans 2001:250). By necessity, the act of positioning has to be understood as two-directional, reflected in the distinction between self-positioning and other-positioning speech acts (Harré and van Langenhove 1991:398). Internal and external positions are in a mutually constitutive relationship: the "[e]xternal positions refer to people and objects in the environment that are, in the eyes of the individual, relevant from the perspective of one or more of the internal positions." (Hermans 2001:252)

Positioning is organically intertwined with stance-taking. The sociolinguist John W. Du Bois holds that stances are understood as something *done* by perceptible communicative means, something *taken* in relation to others and to prior stance acts, and thus inherently dialogical, constituting shared frameworks for co-action with others (2007:171). Positioning, then, may be defined as follows: 1) the subject-oriented facet of stance-taking; the remaining facets include2) object-oriented evaluation of stance objects, and 3) intersubjective alignment. With these three facets of stance in mind, I draw attention to the functions of the gradually introduced external positions in contrast to the stance taken by Kondabolu himself. The analysis aims to uncover the systematic repetition of these positions and stances vis-à-vis each other so as to justify speaking of parallelism as a recurrent, particularly dualistic positional spatialization.

Performing in the United Kingdom, Kondabolu's first interactional move is to explicitly identify himself as an American national. An experientially grounded, discordant juxtaposition between his present location (here) and America is initially based on a paradox, in his home country, he maintains, he is not necessarily thought of as an American. This state of affairs is explicated by the first external voice introduced into the text, "the people"—referentially coherent with Americans—that is simultaneously distant in relation to the speaker's present interlocutors. The recurring (deictic) opposition of the text is thus established: the external position of the people in America and the ongoing interactional event that includes the performer and his audience.

By reconstructing his everyday correspondence with the aforementioned "people" in the form of reported speech, Kondabolu narratively thematizes the experience of being subjected to implicit other-positioning and an externally imposed identity (see Pöysä 2009:327-29). The narrativized dialogue proceeds by allusive questioning on the part of Kondabolu's generic interlocutor, and focuses on the alleged disjuncture between Kondabolu's physiognomy and his national or local identity. The seemingly innocent interrogation indexes the discriminatory normative assumption that phenotypically Indian, or Other in general, bodies cannot be categorized as authentically American identities (compare Chun and Walters 2011:259). Simply put, the external voice indirectly imposes a non-American national or ethnic identity on Kondabolu, or, alternatively, his externally imposed ethnic or racial identity overrides his internal national identity position. The motives of the interlocutor are unveiled by Kondabolu's insistence on the pragmatic motives in the questions posed about issues of skin color over their denotational meaning (1n-1p).[10]

In contrast to the explicitly ideational aspects of racism (the notion of "races" as hierarchically ordered), Kondabolu lays out racism's mode of operation as an everyday practice of coercive other-positioning. The progressive verb form chosen by the speaker to review the stereotypical event ("I'm being judged") codes the other-positioning as ongoing and permanently relevant beyond the narrative storyline.[11] Expressing his own evaluative and affective stance regarding racialization, Kondabolu repudiates the practice, labels it offensive, and simultaneously misaligns himself from his narrated interlocutor with an appeal to intersubjective alignment between himself and his audience ("which is offensive, right?"). By thus positioning his audience with himself—the experiencing-I of the narrative—Kondabolu positions them against other discourses that claim a "monolithic voice of authority"—discourses indexed and figured here by the external voice of the American "people" (Herman 2007:316-17; Pöysä 2009:329). At a global level Kondabolu performs a narrative self-positioning, even while at a local level the narrative itself recounts another person's attempt at other-positioning Kondabolu (see Herman 2007:316).

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[10] The analogic state of affairs in Britain regarding racialization is thus rendered ambiguous by the opening lines. Is Kondabolu rhetorically appealing to his present audience by implying an absence of racialization in Britain? Is he ironically pointing to its inverse, to the colonial and racist history of Britain?

[11] The explicit narrativized dialogue unfolds in the generic present tense (1f), predicated by the adverb "usually," both indexing the typicality of actions (see Reyes 2004:181). The generic reference to the "people" also participates in coding the narrativized event as stereotypical. On the functions of generalizations with respect to evaluative stance-taking, see Scheibman (2007).

Symptomatic of stance, and the interactional climate in general, the verbal formula *be + like* is briefly adopted for voicing the external position (line 1k). Reflective of an essentially polyphonic style that is preoccupied with moral assessments and value judgments, the *be +like* formula has been described as intending to communicate not factual information *verbatim*, but rather, "to convey the opposition between conflicting moral viewpoints and styles of interpersonal communication" (Jones et al. 2011:30; Jones and Schieffelin 2009). Emergent in the morally and affectively charged narrative is a suggestion of the first negative stance object, "the practice of racializing other-positioning" and the inherent stance that accompanies it (Du Bois 2007:141, 159; also Jaffe 2009:16). Communality between performer and his audience is forged through a shared stance toward the external voice/stance rather than shared ethnic or cultural identity (cf. Chun and Walters 2011).

Having established a critical stance against racialization, Kondabolu opts for a rhetorical redescription of it. Through a complex embedding of self- and other-positioning acts, Kondabolu re-positions and self-identifies—somewhat ironically—with tactile qualities of his skin, achieving an implicit other-positioning of the discourse of the "people" (see Herman 2007:316). By foregrounding tactile skin qualities, "his most important qualities," in a manner that seems both "strategically essentialist" (Spivak 1988:205) and playful, attention is drawn to the arbitrary nature of the qualifying traits by which our perceptions and interpretations of others are constructed.[12]

A mediating element, cocoa butter, smoothes the way for Kondabolu to arrive at chocolate…" the dominant trope of the routine (its eponymous title: "My White Chocolate Joke"; see Kondabolu [2014]). This object of his "love" is unconventionally categorized under political issues, suggesting a connection with his preceding, politically charged dialogue. Chocolate, and, the affective sociopolitical domain associated with it, are analogically juxtaposed with the everyday social relations between Americans and their concomitant ideological articulations. Kondabolu invokes another unrecognizable external voice, here in the passive voice (4c), plainly spelling out this articulation. Lines 4a-4d constitute an explicit reiteration of the implications made in the first segment. Racialization is now thematized as "first thoughts," the unreflective, habitual, and highly affective presumptions made about others. Chocolate, by contrast, becomes emblematic of a neutral, racially conscious worldview, evoking (now racially motivated) associations of "brown" in opposition to "white." This articulation is brought home by another generalization (4f-4g) when Kondabolu augments his stance by broadening its indexical field and appealing to the experiences and beliefs of his interlocutors (Scheibman 2007:131-32).

From the perspective of the emergent parallelistic configuration, chocolate is seen to be the second and emblematically positive stance object of the text (first "loved" in 3d, secondly "liked" in 4e). The two stance objects are set in an analogical, antithetical relationship, invoking two divergent stances. As the central nodes of the parallelistic configuration, the external position of the "American people" is portrayed by the dialogue as the practice of racializing other-positioning. This external position constitutes the first negative stance object in the text.Next,

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[12] Notice also the comically motivated mini-parallelism, a rhetorical epistrophe, on lines 2b-2h as Kondabolu emphatically repeats the words "of my skin."

there are the unreflective associations involving chocolate, the second stance object, which is rendered proximal by the affective predicates "love" and "like." The analogical mapping, finally, moves between the two domains. It is characteristic of this parallelism that insofar as the positional configuration is projected through the internal position of the speaking subject himself —unreflective first associations with chocolate are aligned with Kondabolu—the speaking subject also functions as a sign in the emergent poetic structure. The result is a form of parallelism that is apprehended through the diagrammatic iconicity of the configuration and is prominently contextualized with respect to the ongoing interactional event.[13]

An emergent analogical network that involves discriminatory unreflective "first thoughts" prompts Kondabolu to consider the artificially superfluous existence of white chocolate, the diametric opposite (in the ideologically determined poetic configuration) of the positively esteemed counterpart, brown chocolate. Coordinated through diagrammatic iconicity with the practice of racialization—the voice/position personifying unreflective white-orientation, retrospectively designated as "fucking racist" (4h-4i)—white chocolate thus constitutes the third, and emblematically negative, stance object.[14]   The complete parallelistic configuration is presented in the following table:

The Parallelistic Configuration			
S t a n c e s		Parallel positions/stance objects set in an analogical relation	
	Positive	the internal position of Kondabolu, participants of the present speech event, racially conscious worldview ("here," "the United Kingdom")	the unreflective associations of (brown) chocolate
	Negative	the external position of the "American people," the practice of other-positioning, racialization, *in America* ("there")	the unreflective associations of white chocolate
		←←**Diagrammatic Iconicity**→→	

At an apparent high point in the routine, in the sixth segment Kondabolu enacts an "instant character" who embodies the recurrent external position of the text. Parodically elaborating on the historical, or etiological, implications of ideologically dubious white

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[13] Paul Kockelman (2016:314) describes diagrammatic iconicity as a relation between two sets of signs: "it is not that a sign has a quality in common with its object; it is that the relation between signs has a quality in common with the relation between objects." In stand-up performances, there is often a diagrammatic iconicity between the comic-as-character engaging socially with other characters in a narrated story-world, and the comic-as-performer engaging with an audience in the here-and-now.

[14] While it is arguably true that, by association, the prototypical semantic field of the concept of chocolate prominently features the quality of brownness, associating chocolate with the color white hardly constitutes a racist act. Nor is the commensurability between associating chocolate unreflectively with whiteness and associating Americanness with white skin color at all self-evident. More likely, this analogy between the two articulations is perceived as comic because it is far-fetched *yet* still makes sense on its own terms. In other words, the analogy is (at least somewhat) valid, given that it "is focused on one of the central, essential traits of the two entities being compared" (Attardo et al. 2002:10-11). Metaphorical or analogical links are, after all, creative acts, constituting similarity by themselves and making us attend to proposed likenesses (Davidson 1990:431).

chocolate, this voice unmistakably—even, suitably, given its alignment with the "people" of America—indexes the voice of a male advertiser. This is achieved by a lowered voice pitch and stereotypical question-answer structure reminiscent of the advertising register, more specifically, a mock-register of advertising. The irony of the sequence emanates from a voiced advertisement implying racism so profound that it eschews and shuns the color brown, no matter the context.

The contrasts between the external position and Kondabolu himself, and between the opposing stances actualized by the routine, emerge during the shift from the fifth to the sixth segment. The ensuing mimetic parody (6a-) establishes a shift onto a diametrically opposite stance, condensing the parallelistic configuration into a single parodic sequence that also functions as the climax of the routine (cf. the third segment in Lee's routine, similarly preceded by a rhetorical question). From the perspective of stance, parody is emblematically parallelistic, built on an inherent duality of stances. Like all revoicings, factual or imaginary, parody dialogically presupposes and responds to a prior stance and constitutes tension between two stances of voice or two conflicting figures. In the context of verbal art such as stand-up comedy, the speaker implicitly distances herself from the parodied figure or persona while simultaneously embodying it, producing a superposition and collision of voices and stances (Chun and Walters 2011).

Conflating white-chocolate manufacturers with the supposed manufacturers of standard, traditional representations of white Jesus iterates another expansion of the parallelistic configuration, achieving a rhetorical high point in the play-acted sequence. Representations of white Jesus become emblematically equivalent with the existence of ideologically suspect white chocolate. The message of the routine is brought forward by a final metonymical addition to suggest that the sphere of influence exercised by discriminatory racialization is wider than the petty realm of chocolate.

Introduced initially as a rudimentary configuration of contrastive social positions and stances, the positional configuration has expanded into an analogical network of associations. This network is built on poetically accomplished mappings through the apprehension of diagrammatic iconicity in the configuration of its three nodes: 1) the practice of racialization, 2) white chocolate, and 3) white representations of Jesus. Even though formally distinct, the three nodes remain functionally, or in this case, "etiologically" comparable signs. The so-called positional type of parallelism described here is formally stylized and decontextualized from the ongoing interactional event to a lesser degree than was evident in the Stewart Lee routine. However, the positional type of parallelism is ultimately commensurate with the first type (that lays emphasis on sequential repetition) in building on iconic comparability or resemblance between separate but mutually implicating co-textual signs. Semiotically stable in the manifestation of indexical iconicity, the flexibility of parallelism affords diverse manifestations at the level of discursive presentation.

The Flexibility of Parallelism

In this article, I have endeavored to promote and argue for operationalizing the concept of parallelism with regard to the materials and empirical cases at hand (see also Frog 2014b). I have

corroborated and ratified the original observation of Glick (2007), who identified parallelism as one of the central poetic devices in stand-up comedy. Two somewhat distinct approaches to parallelism—the textual and the positional approaches— have been reviewed and deployed to analyze two cases drawn from commercially edited stand-up comedy recordings. Illuminating the polarizing and confrontational character of stand-up comedy, parallelism often figures in comedic contexts as a coercive technique suggesting analogical inferences, and its rhetorical power is derived from juxtaposing contrastive or otherwise frictional stances in recurring twin constellations. An indirect form of expression that presupposes a measure of reflexivity on part of the recipient, parallelism that entails divergent analogical pairs is particularly suitable for creating ironic effects.

In the first case study, parallelism was described as constituted by formally delineated and sequentially positioned segments of discourse. In this case, the efficacy of parallelism can be readily conceptualized as the performativity of formal text-metrical structure across separate discursive segments (see Agha 2007:60-61). Thematically this parallelism established an analogical relational network between the domains of humans and non-human animals. Analysis of the performance revealed its play with strong moral stances, set in an oppositional, reflexively reciprocal relationship by the emergent parallelism. These stances were identified as one of economism and another represented by self-evident "shared values," euphemistically indexed in the routine by the descriptively recounted "facts of nature." This case demonstrates how, although ubiquitous in many conversational genres, the poetics of parallelism may be "exaggerated" for pragmatic effect in other, "relatively ritualized discourse genres—spells, taunts, verbal duels, political oratory" (Lempert 2014:384)—not to forget stand-up comedy.

On the other hand, analysis of the second case study reveals parallelism as a specifically dualistic positional spatialization of discursive interaction. Here parallelism is recognized by and associated with the recurrent structural relation of a configuration of positioning, a configuration that manifests a variety of diagrammatic iconicity through which constituent signs and their relationships become comparable. The juxtaposition between the positions of the "American people" (there) and Kondabolu himself (here, in the UK) is gradually foregrounded in performance, and, finally, rendered diagrammatically iconic with another pair of signs, the two varieties of chocolate. The process of iconization of the configuration (motivated by "unreflective first thoughts") subsumes the varieties of chocolate to an emblem in the initial ideological frame and, thus, indexically corroborates the message of the routine, the critique of racialization. One of the main characteristics of this case relates to the fact that insofar as the positional configuration is projected through, and intimately associated with, the speaking subject himself, it is also being mapped onto the participants of the speech event who, in turn, become activated as signs in the emergent poetic structure. The result is a parallelism that is prominently contextualized and anchored to the ongoing event.

Whereas in the first example parallelism was seen as emerging fully formed over adjacent discursive segments—the high level of formal stylization adding to its rhetorical and comic effect—the second example allows us to observe the development of parallelism from a rudimentary configuration of social positions and stances to a complete analogical network of associations. Though perhaps superficially different—by a degree of formal stylization and decontextualization from the ongoing speech event—both types of parallelisms fundamentally

rely on iconic mappings between the configuration of co-textual signs that index mutually contrastive stances. James Wilce (2008:98) identifies a built-in foundation for parallelism in the deictics of the world's languages. Socially recognizable evaluative and affective stances provide another foundation, and not least in comedic contexts.

Methodological flexibility can be highly appealing, if not indispensable, for the study of a phenomenon as nebulous and under-theorized (Frog 2014b:9, citing Nigel Fabb) as parallelism. I propose understanding both of the methodical orientations presented here to be complementary, rather than mutually exclusive, nurturing their dialogical relations. Other approaches certainly exist, and their elaboration is also to be encouraged.

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