Instructor’s Statement:

Comedy is corrective. Comedy addresses “life out of balance.” Its goals are harmony and natural order. Comedy is not about nobility or aspiration; it is about survival. A classical tragedy ends in a death; a classical comedy ends in a marriage. While tragedy rails against fate, destiny, injustice and death, comedy is a negotiation with life. A laugh is an involuntary recognition of life’s imperfection. It signifies the acceptance of a compromise between what is, and what ought to be. The ability to negotiate with, and make peace with existence through laughter is a uniquely human gift.

A laugh is an involuntary, reflexive recognition of a truth or contradiction. Fostering comic performance is the act of conjuring that reflexive laugh. The role of the director of comedy is like that of a
conjurer. It is the director’s job to conjure the laugh. I believe that can be taught.

Goals and Objectives:

This workshop course will explore the specific challenges of directing the comic narrative. Students do assignments, exercises and rehearsals that lead to the filming of a two person scene. Issues of casting, directing actors, scene analysis, point of view, shooting styles, shooting methods, staging and editing will be considered from the comedic perspective.

This class represents something of an experiment. Although classes exist and many books have been written on writing comedy, few (if any) take up the challenges of directing comedy. There are those who do not believe that such a thing can be taught. Mel Brooks has Carmen Ghia, an outrageous character in “The Producers,” speaking in fractured English about comic aptitude say, “Or you got it - or you ain’t”. It would seem that the majority of comedy practitioners are satisfied to leave the matter at that.

Aptitude is an asset in the study of any subject and this one is certainly no exception. The ability to “get” a joke, a sense of humor and of timing will be needed to fully benefit from our work together. Still, I believe that there are underlying principles that pertain to comedy that can be studied and applied by all directors. This course will attempt to identify those principles and demonstrate their application.

Full Disclosure:

I subscribe to, what for some might be, a broad definition of the comedy genre. Anton Chekhov described his great plays as
Comedies. There are those who find that claim to be puzzling. I have always found it to be apt. The contemporary trend is toward such a broad definition. Television series such as “Weeds” and “Monk” compete for Emmy Awards with the more obviously comedic “Two and a Half Men” and “The Office”. In my estimation “Some Like It Hot” is a supremely great comedy, and “Sunset Boulevard” is as well. I have no problem placing “Austin Powers” and “American Beauty” together on a comedy continuum, and will endeavor, in the teaching of this course, to explain why.

Course Description:

We will begin with lecture-demonstrations aimed at understanding the fundamental similarity between comedy and tragedy, and elucidating the nature of their differences.

Our goal will be to understand why something is funny. We will consider comedy in all its forms, physical, verbal, visual, auditory, transformational. Once we agree on “the why” of funny, we will explore where to look for fun, how to capture the funny and conjure the laugh.

To do this we must examine many subjects through the comedy lens. These include the nature of logic and belief in comedy, the uses of anticipation and misdirection, the challenges comedy places on casting, rehearsing, staging, blocking and shooting. We will consider the roles of text and improvisation in rehearsal and performance, as well as the obligations comedy places on props, costume, scenery, tempo etc. We will tackle the subject of “Choices,” and why some are more suited to comedy than others.

We will undertake the telling of jokes and examine the relationship between the telling of a joke and the recounting of a story. We will analyze the structure of The Joke and relate it to Story Structure. We will extend this analogy while exploring the relationship among the elements of the narrative story: The Moment, The Beat, The Scene and The Act. Each will be considered as if it were a joke with a set up, a payoff, and something
to “get”. This will form the basis of our method of Scene Breakdown.

Armed with this tool we will approach the analysis of the screenplay *50/50* by Will Reiser. Each student will be assigned a two-person scene from this screenplay to direct. The student will subject the scene to a “breakdown”, cast it, rehearse it outside of class, and then bring the actors for an in-class rehearsal. The director will then have the opportunity to repeat the process, rehearsing both outside and again in class, before filming and editing the scene for presentation and critique.

Through this process of exploration, and trial and error, it is expected that the student will learn to apply practical principles for directing comedy.

**Class Philosophy:**

In this class, learning is a group endeavor.

I am well aware that most students will be new to the concepts and practices we are considering. I am not so much looking for results, but rather for participation and engagement with a process.

I expect students to learn as much from each other’s missteps as from the triumphs. Those missteps are very valuable. I will appreciate your generosity in taking the risks to make mistakes, and your openness to sharing them with the class.

**Required Texts:**

*The Comic Toolbox* by John Vorhaus
http://www.amazon.com/Comic-Toolbox-Funny-Even-Youre/dp/1879505215/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1356230359&sr=1-1&keywords=the+comic+toolbox

*50/50* by Will Reiser

*Directing Actors* by Judith Weston
Assigned Readings:

Mandatory readings assigned throughout the semester. Readings will be discussed in class and you may be quizzed on their contents.

Rehearsals:

Rehearsal is a critical tool in the making of comedy. This class will teach rehearsal technique and sharpen the students' appreciation for the use of rehearsal in the finding and rendering of comedy. Students are required to rehearse at least FOUR HOURS outside of class before bringing work into class.

Blogging and Written Reflections:

All students are required to post at least one comment on the Class Blog each week that they are not writing a “Reflection”. To receive full credit 2 posts must be made before mid-semester and 2 posts after. No partial credit will be given for fewer than the required 2 posts per half.

A Written Reflection on one’s work and learning experience must be emailed to me by 12pm on the Wednesday after each in-class rehearsal and after the final screening.

Four Blog Posts and Three Reflections must be written and turned in to complete this course.
All students must be properly registered to be a Contributor to the class blog on Facebook by the second week of class. Your SA will send detailed instructions on how to sign up. If for any reason you are having trouble registering with Facebook, you must contact your SA by phone or email.

**Labeling of Assignments:**
Assignments must be labeled using the following format:  
Course #-Your Last Name-Assignment-Date.  
For Example:  476-Smith-Midterm-10/15/14

The label must be on the document itself...NOT JUST THE EMAIL SUBJECT LINE  
The S.A. will not accept any assignment not properly labeled.

**Disclaimer and Fair Warning:**
Comedy is controversial by its nature. One of its functions is to test moral and social boundaries. Material shown and discussed is class may offend. Be aware of this possibility before deciding to take this class.

**Grading:**
ACTIVE participation on the part of students is essential. This entails thorough preparation of exercises and scenes. Grading will be based upon the extent and thoroughness of preparation, and the growth evidenced during the semester.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation*</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quizzes &amp; Assignments</td>
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<td>Blogs</td>
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<td>Reflections</td>
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<td>Rehearsals</td>
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<td>Final project</td>
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*PARTICIPATION is the engine of Group Learning. It is a crucial
element in your grade. It includes commitment to the class, involvement with other students’ work, and engagement with the material.

Due Dates:

Missing deadlines is generally regarded as unacceptable in the Industry, and so it will be in this class. If you know ahead of time that unavoidable circumstances will prevent “delivery”, you must notify Instructor immediately, and the circumstances must be documented. Likewise, if an unavoidable calamity prevents timely “delivery”, it must be a genuine emergency and again must be documented. Unexcused missed due dates will result in reduction of 2/3 of a grade for each full class period past the original due date.

Attendance/Absence:

Credit towards your grade cannot -- by University policy -- be given for simply being present. It is expected that you will attend class, and if you are unavoidably going to miss class, your S.A. and I MUST be notified in advance in writing (e-mail). All justifications must be verifiable.

You will be permitted ONE unexcused absence. Beyond that, you will receive a reduction of 1/3 OVERALL COURSE GRADE per unexcused absence. Your SA will keep track of attendance.

Late Arrival:
I do not like to be petty about tardiness, so I don’t set specific penalties. However, in cases where it becomes chronic, I will give one “warning”, and then I will assign penalties. Your SA will keep track of late arrivals.

Notes Regarding Video Projects:

IT IS REQUIRED THAT STUDENTS READ THE FULL SCREENPLAY FROM WHICH THEIR SCENES ORIGINATE. IT IS ALL RIGHT IF YOU HAVE SEEN THE FILM IN THE PAST, BUT YOU MUST NOT REVISIT IT UNTIL AFTER YOUR PROJECT IS COMPLETED.

DIRECTORS MUST PRINT OUT COPIES OF THE COMPLETE SCREENPLAY FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR ACTORS. DIRECTORS ARE REQUIRED TO PROVIDE THE ENTIRE SCREENPLAY FOR THEIR ACTORS AND URGE THEM TO READ IT. ACTORS MUST BE INSTRUCTED NOT TO VIEW THE FINISHED FILM.

CTPR 476 is a Workshop Course, not a Production Course. As such we are more concerned with the impact of performance, storytelling, and the rendering of comedy than with the technical quality of the final DVD. It is more important to optimize the quality of the sound than it is to demonstrate artistry in lighting, costuming, location or other production values. Directors are strongly encouraged to keep shooting and editing styles simple and unobtrusive.

NO SCENES MAY BE SHOT AS EXTERIORS without prior approval.

I ENCOURAGE DIRECTORS TO RE-EDIT and RE-SUBMIT THEIR SCENES AFTER THE IN-CLASS SCREENING. THIS WILL RESULT IN ENHANCED LEARNING AND MAY BE USED FOR EXTRA CREDIT.
USE OF SCHOOL EQUIPMENT:

Students will be responsible for payment of insurance for usage of school equipment. You may request permission to use additional equipment. If permission is granted you will be required to obtain insurance for that equipment through Joe Wallenstein’s office. Students sharing the same production number have the obligation to work together. Since there is one camera between them, one student can function as the DP while the other is directing. As the Director, a student may ELECT to have someone other than their prod# partner serve as the DP, but each student is responsible to serve in that capacity if called upon. No director may photograph his/her own scene.

All projects should be presented in-class on a DVD. A DVD must be left with the instructor. A DVD copy of the scene must be given to each cast member. All DVDs must be watermarked as a USC Classroom exercise, and must not include the name of source material in the titles. SAG cast members must be reminded that they are allowed to post no more than thirty seconds of the material given them onto the Internet.

School-provided video cameras may be reserved in the SCA Equipment Room, and you must give reserve the week in advance, as you must with the sound department and grip/lighting equipment center.

Students may edit their projects in SCA post. We will be editing on the Avid Express Pro systems. Two students will be paired on a single drive. You may edit on your own equipment, but equipment failure will then not be an acceptable excuse for missed delivery.

IT IS ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL THAT GOOD SOUND BE RECORDED FOR EVERY SCENE. YOU MUST USE THE BOOM MIC WHEN FILMING. It is not acceptable to only use the on-camera microphone for the scene you present in class.
Casting is crucial. Students must hold at least two auditions in the course of the semester. As actors do, on occasion, drop out of projects, It is strongly advised that you be prepared with backup casting options.

SAFETY:

All students are expected to abide by USC School of Cinematic Arts Safety Guidelines. Violations of any of the safety guidelines may result in disciplinary action ranging from confiscation of footage to expulsion from the University.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to the Instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday-Friday, 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. The office is in Student Union 301, and their phone number is (213)740-0776.

Statement on Academic Integrity
USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any
suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/.

STUDENT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND AGREEMENT

CTPR 476  FALL 2014

I  (print your name)
__________________________________________________________

have read the syllabus for CTPR 476. I acknowledge the requirements and rules of the course, and agreed to meet and abide by them.

Signed,

(your signature)
__________________________________________________________

Please print and fill out this page and turn it in to your class SA, Mike Starr, by the third class. Late turn in will be counted as a late assignment.
WEEK ONE  1/14/15

Welcome & Attendance

INTRO TO 476 - Presentation

JOKE TELLING - Exercise

JOKES ARE STORIES - Presentation

HOUSEKEEPING - Presentation

Fill Out Forms
Assign individuals for Acting Exercise

WEEK ONE ASSIGNMENTS:

1. SIGN ONTO WEBSITE - address: BKKELLMAN.COM
   username: STUDENT
   password: CLASSROOM

2. READ SYLLABUS - on website

3. PRINT OUT: “STUDENT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND AGREEMENT”
   sign and return agreement to SA* due 3rd class

4. If you haven’t already -WRITE A PERSONAL INTRODUCTION-
   email to Barnet
Send me a short personal introduction. Tell me where you are from. What year you are in. What your interests are. What else you're studying and doing this semester. Did you take 475 or 507 and from whom? Any thoughts or plans you may have for after graduation. Anything else you want me to know about yourself. 

Search your early childhood recollections and tell me the first thing you remember making you laugh.

Send me a list of your five favorite film or TV comedies. 

Describe one funny scene that you remember.

5. GET YOUR TEXTBOOKS

- **title:** The Comic Toolbox  
  **author:** John Vorhaus  
  **isbn#:** 1-879505-21-5  
  **publisher:** Silman-James Press  

also 

- **Directing Actors**  
  **author:** Judith Weston  
  available at campus bookstore or Amazon  

5. READING ASSIGNMENTS from texts

1. **“Directing Actors”** “Introduction” (pp. 1-12)“Result Direction & Quick Fixes” (pp. 13-47)

2. **The Comic Toolbox** - Chapter One“Comedy is Truth and Pain” pages 1 through 8

6. READING ASSIGNMENTS from Website
from MATERIALS page:

HOW TO APPROACH THIS COURSE - BK:
RULES & REGULATIONS
BLOGS & REFLECTIONS FAQs
j. Cohen -HOW TO SUCCEED IN BARNET'S CLASS

from ARTICLES page:

Tad Friend - “What’s So Funny?”

WEEK TWO 1/21/15

Discuss Readings

ACTING Exercise

DIRECTING ACTORS Presentation

CASTING COMEDY Presentation

Assign Scenes and Groups

WEEK TWO ASSIGNMENTS:

Attend Casting Seminar

READ from texts:

“Directing Actors”- Moment to Moment (pp.49-76) Listening (p.77-90)

“The Comic Toolbox” - Chapter Two “The Will to Risk”
READ from Website:

Under BK Handouts

BK - DIRECTING ACTORS
BK - CASTING
BK - COMEDY CASTING Q&A

Under Articles

Grazer Thin-Slicing Tom Hanks
Larry - SETTING UP AN AUDITION

WEEK THREE 1/28/15

Discuss Readings

CASTING/AUDITION Demonstration

REHEARSAL Demonstration

Casting Period Begins

WEEK THREE ASSIGNMENTS:

BEGIN CASTING

READ - screenplay:
50/50

READ from texts -

WESTIN: “Actors" Choices” (pp. 91-132)
“Casting” (pp. 235-244)
VORHAUS: Chapter Three: “The Comic Premise” pages 19-29

READ from Website:

BK-DIRECTING ACTORS on Website under BK Handouts

WATCH from Website:

Brooks/Moss Workshop - Website under BK Handouts/videos

REQUIRED BLOG POST - about In-Class Audition or Rehearsal Demonstrations or Brooks/Moss Workshop video

WEEK FOUR 2/04/15

Discuss Readings

REHEARSAL Presentation

Show Scenes with Beats Examples

MOMENT & BEATS Presentation

MY BOYS BEATS Presentation

WEEK FOUR ASSIGNMENTS:

Group A Begin Rehearsals

READ from Texts:
WESTIN - “Script Analysis” (pp. 163-234) “Rehearsal” (pp. 245-279)
VORHAUS - Chapter Four “Characters” pages 30 through 46
READ from Website:
Under Class Materials:
BK - SCENE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET rev. for Spr 14
Under BK Handouts
BK - AN APPROACH TO DIRECTING THE SCENE

WEEK FIVE  2/11/15
Discuss Readings
INTERPRETATION/MAKING A SCENE PLAY Presentation
SCENE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET Presentation
SCENE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET Demonstration

WEEK FIVE ASSIGNMENTS:
All Students begin Scene Analysis Worksheets
Group A Students schedule Scene Analysis Meetings
Groups A&B Begin Rehearsals
READ from Texts:

WESTIN: Append.B /C “Comedy” “Lists of Action Verbs” (p.296-307)
VORHAUS: Chapter Seven “The Comic Through Line” p 75 -102

READ from Website:

Under BK - Handouts:

BK- EIGHT POINT CHECKLIST
BK - NOTES ON STAGING
BK - IN REHEARSAL - ASK YOURSELF

Under Articles:
THE DISCIPLINE OF PLAY

Under Class Materials:
HOW TO PREPARE FOR SCENE ANALYSIS MEETING

WEEK SIX 02/18/15

Discuss Readings

DIRECTING COMEDY PRESENTATION
WEEK SIX ASSIGNMENTS:

Group A & B schedule Scene Analysis Meetings

Group B Students schedule Scene Analysis Meetings

Group B&C Begin Rehearsals

READ from Texts:

WESTIN “Shooting” (pp. 281-290)

VORHAUS - Chapter Six “Types of Comic Stories”

READ from Website:

Under Class Materials:

BK - REMINDER FOR REHEARSERS

Under Blog Archive:

COPING WITH CRITIQUE
FLAG ON THE PLAY
COMEDY IS SERIOUS BUSINESS

WEEK SEVEN  02/25/15

Rehearsal #1 Group A
WEEK SEVEN ASSIGNMENTS:

Group C Scene Analysis Meetings

READ from Texts:

VORHAUS  *The Comic Toolbox* Chapter Eight
More Tools from the Toolbox p. 103-115

READ From Website:

Under Articles:

ZINOMAN - Get The Laughs But Follow The Rules - NY Times
BERDIK - Why our brains make us laugh

Under BK-Handouts:

BK - THE SEARCH FOR THE EVENT

Group A 1st Rehearsal Reflection due by noon, day of next class

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WEEK EIGHT 03/04/15

Rehearsal #1 Group B
WEEK EIGHT ASSIGNMENTS:

READ from Texts:

VORHAUS The Comic Toolbox Chapter Eight
“More Tools from the Toolbox” page 103 through 115

READ from Website:

Under BK Handouts:

BK - TO COMEDY SCENE DIRECTORS AT MIDSEMESTER

Group B 1st Rehearsal Reflection due by noon day of next class

WEEK NINE 03/11/15

Rehearsal #1 Group C

WEEK NINE ASSIGNMENTS:

Group C 1st Rehearsal Reflection due by noon 3/18/15

FIRST TWO BLOGS DUE before recess begins
READ from Texts:

VORHAUS *The Comic Toolbox* Chapter Ten
“Comedy and Jeopardy” page 117-124
“Still More Tools from the Toolbox” page 125-138

READ from Website:

Under Articles:

GLASS on Creative Process

Under Blog Archives:

COMMUNICATION
DECISION POINTS

MIDSEMESTER------RECESS 3/16 - 3/20

Midterm Warnings - sent by email where necessary

WEEK TEN 03/25/15

STAGING AND SHOOTING Presentation & Demonstration

COMEDY Presentation

WEEK TEN ASSIGNMENTS:
READ from Texts:

VORHAUS *The Comic Toolbox*
Chapter 14 “Through Polished and Perfection”  p.162-173

READ from Website:

Under BK Handouts:

BK SHOOT EXPECTATIONS
BK KEYS TO COMEDY DIRECTION

Under Articles:

Key & Peele Make Fun of Everything
Lipsey - On Directing Comedy

WEEK ELEVEN  04/01/15

Rehearsal #2 Group A

WEEK ELEVEN ASSIGNMENTS:

Group A 2nd Rehearsal Reflection due by noon, day of next class

GROUP A SHOOTING
READ from Website:

Under Class Materials:

DCS FINAL ASSIGNMENTS – COMPLETION REQUIREMENTS

WEEK X 04/08/15

NO CLASS MEETING - TAKE HOME MIDTERM EXAM
Due Sunday 4/12

WEEK X ASSIGNMENTS:

ALL DOING TAKE HOME MIDTERM
ALL GROUPS REHEARSING

READ from Texts:

VORHAUS *The Comic Toolbox* Chapter Fifteen
Scrap Metal and Doughnuts” p.174 -184

READ from Website :

Under Articles:

Dean - Habits of the Comic Mind
WEEK TWELVE 04/15/15

Rehearsal #2 Group B

WEEK TWELVE ASSIGNMENTS:

Group B 2nd Rehearsal Reflection due by noon day of next class
GROUP B SHOOTING

WEEK THIRTEEN 04/22/15

Rehearsal #2 Group C

WEEK THIRTEEN ASSIGNMENTS:

Group C 2nd Rehearsal Reflection due by noon day of next class
GROUP C SHOOTING
WEEK FOURTEEN  04/29/15

Screen Group A Scenes

WEEK FOURTEEN ASSIGNMENTS:

Group A SHOOT FINAL Reflection due by noon day of next class
Group A FINAL SCENE ANALYSIS due by noon day of next class

WEEK FIFTEEN  05/06/15 -

FINAL Screen Group B Scenes
Screen Group C Scenes

WEEK FIFTEEN AND FINAL ASSIGNMENTS:

READ from Website:

Under Class Materials:

re read  DCS FINAL ASSIGNMENTS – COMPLETION REQUIREMENTS
ALL SECOND TWO BLOGS DUE
Group B & C SHOOT Reflection due by noon 7 days after class
Group B & C FINAL SCENE ANALYSIS due by noon 7 days after class

05/13/15

Note: Schedule and Assignments Subject to Change - check class website for weekly updates