

Instructor: Louise Peacock

Office: JEF 202

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 10 – 11. Please contact me for appointments.

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Course Description and Overview

This GE course will provide students with an overview and understanding of the history and performance of comedy. Using examples from as far back as Greek Theatre and as current as Modern Family, students will be encouraged to identify and understand the distinctive features, techniques and themes of comedy performance. Through many manifestations including the pantomimes of the Greek and Roman periods, the Commedia dell'Arte of the Renaissance, the flourishing of the circus, the great age of silent comedy in cinema, and the postwar screen era, comedy in performance has evolved in multiple forms as a response to prevailing conditions while maintaining many primary functions, including satire, celebration, and social commentary. The course explores in depth many of the most important and influential periods and differing strains of comic performance, addressing the discipline in terms of creation and execution as envisaged by writers, actors, clowns, comedians, and directors.

Learning Objectives

- 1. To analyze the form and content of comic material across a range of historic periods and to investigate the impact of comedy on audiences*
- 2. To make connections between the comedy of different periods, identifying the social, political and cultural contexts in which the work was created and performed.*
- 3. To enrich the student's discernment of creative production by increasing knowledge of its theoretical, historical, and aesthetic bases across history and cultures.*

Prerequisite(s): course(s) that must be taken prior to this course

Co-Requisite (s): course(s) that must be taken prior to or simultaneously

Concurrent Enrollment: course(s) that must be taken simultaneously

Recommended Preparation: course work or background that is advisable, not mandatory

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

For required reading and viewing please see breakdown of class schedule. All viewing and reading should be carried out **PRIOR** to the class for which it is indicated.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Each assignment will receive a grade out of 100.

Grading Scale:

- A Work of excellent quality
- B Work of good quality
- C Work of average quality
- D Work of below average quality
- F Inadequate work

Assignment Submission Policy: All Critical Paper assignments to be submitted via Turnitin on Blackboard. Due dates are as follows:

Assignment 1 (Performance Analysis) Monday 18th September

Midterm (Annotated Bibliography) Friday 6th October

Assignment 2 (Critical Paper) Friday 27th October

Assignment 3 (Critical Paper) Friday 17th November

The Final Examination paper is due by 4pm on Thursday Dec 7th. No late papers will be accepted without medical evidence.

No late assignments, projects, exams, or papers shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur.

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Attendance/participation in class	15	15
Assignment 1 (Performance Analysis)	15	15
Midterm (Annotated Bibliography)	20	20
Assignment 2 (Critical Paper)	15	15
Assignment 3 (critical paper)	15	15
Final (critical paper)	20	20
TOTAL	100	100.00

Classroom Etiquette

Please arrive promptly for the class. Late arrivals disturb the learning of the whole class.

Please ensure that you have prepared for the class and are in a fit state to contribute.

Please do not use your cell phone during class. I do allow the use of tablets and laptops in my classes but if you are found on irrelevant websites during class I will ask you to switch to taking notes on paper.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Block 1	What is Comedy?
Week 1 Tuesday	<u>Introduction – What is Comedy and how can we analyze it?</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does analyzing comedy ruin the joke? Viewing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABUuFJU71PY Reading: https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/jun/02/jimmy-carr-joke-standup-comedy https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/jul/27/comedy
Week 1 Thursday	<u>Comic Vocabularies</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comedy/comedic/comic Humor, humorous, funny Laughter Comic Timing Joke/gag/skit/sketch/punchline

	Research task: gather definitions of the terms listed above
Week 2 Tuesday	<p><u>Comic Devices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language use • Mistaken identity • Structural elements: anticipation/repetition/variation/inversion • Slapstick <p>Reading: Eric Weitz, Chapter 3 Comic Devices in The Cambridge Introduction to Comedy, pages 63 – 92 (ARES)</p>
Week 2 Thursday	<p><u>Comic Theories (or how other people discuss comedy) and how to apply them</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superiority Theory • Incongruity Theory • Relief Theory <p>Reading: John Morreall, Comic Relief pages 1 – 26 (on ARES)</p>
Week 3 Tuesday	<p><u>How to analyse Comedic Performance</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class exercises <p>Reading: Louise Peacock, Joan Rivers – Reading the Meaning (on Blackboard) Viewing: See Blackboard for youtube links.</p>
Week 3 Thursday 9/8	<p><u>Comic Forms</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • television (sketch shows, sitcoms, animation, mockumentaries) • films (romcoms, screwball comedies, spoofs) • standup comedy/sketch comedy • theatre: farce, pantomime, comic plays • hybrid forms: magic and ventriloquism • clowns: theatre and circus <p>Viewing: See Blackboard for youtube links</p>
Assignment 1 – Performance Analysis	Analyze one of the performance examples set. You should draw on whichever theory and vocabulary you find most helpful. An assignment brief is provided on blackboard
Block 2	Comedy, Identity and Ethics
Week 4 Tuesday	<p><u>The Ethics of Comedy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can comedy cause more harm than good?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can comedy do? • What should comedy do? <p>Reading: Sharon Lockyer and Michael Pickering Introduction from <i>Beyond a Joke</i> (ARES)</p>
Week 4 Thursday	<p><u>Comedy and Race</u></p> <p>Reading: The Hidden Truths in Contemporary Black Sitcoms from <i>The Sitcom Reader: America Re-viewed, still skewed.</i> (ARES)</p> <p>Viewing: See Blackboard for youtube links</p>
Week 5 Tuesday	<p><u>Comedy and Gender</u></p> <p>Reading: Nothing Suits me like a suit: Performing Masculinity in <i>How I met your Mother</i></p> <p>Viewing: See Blackboard for youtube links</p>
Week 5 Thursday	<p><u>Comedy and Sexuality</u></p> <p>Reading: Parody as Subversive performance: Denaturalising gender and reconstituting desire in Ellen in <i>Text and Performance Quarterly</i> vol 21 issue 2 2001 (ARES)</p> <p>Viewing: See Blackboard for youtube links</p>
Week 6 Tuesday	<p><u>Comedy and Religion</u></p> <p>Reading: Is it ok for comedians to joke about religion? Available at: http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/09/opinions/obeidallah-comedians-religious-jokes/ and When God and Comedy meet: Stephen Colbert on Christianity. Available at: http://splitsider.com/2012/09/when-god-and-comedy-meet-stephen-colbert-on-christianity/</p> <p>Viewing: See Blackboard for youtube links.</p>
Week 6 Thursday	<p><u>Comedy and Offence</u></p> <p>Viewing: See Blackboard for youtube links</p> <p>Reading: When the truth hurts tell a joke: why America Needs its comedians. Available online: http://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/174-when-the-truth-hurts-tell-a-joke-why-america-needs-its-comedians</p>

	Research task: find and read an article which deals with comedians being criticized for offensive material. Your example should be as recent as possible.
Midterm Assignment - Bibliography	Annotated bibliography. Assignment brief on blackboard
Block 3	Comedy and Entertainment
Week 7 Tuesday	<u>Music Hall, Vaudeville and Variety</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading: <i>No Applause – Just Throw Money</i> by S.D. Trav, pages 54 – 81 (available via ARES) Viewing : See Blackboard for youtube links
Week 7 Thursday	<u>Silent Comedy</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slapstick, jokes and narrative Viewing: Charlie Chaplin’s <i>The Kid</i> (on course reserve) and Buster Keaton’s <i>Steamboat Bill Jr</i> (on course reserve) <p>Reading : Frank Krutnik and Steve Neale, <i>Hollywood Comedy and the case of Silent Slapstick</i> from <i>Popular Film and Television Comedy</i> (ARES)</p>
Week 8 Tuesday	<u>Film Comedy</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Viewing: <i>Home Alone</i> (available to view online via library catalogue) Why Pain and Violence can be funny. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading: <i>No Pain No Gain: The Provocation of Laughter in Slapstick Comedy</i> by Louise Peacock. Can be accessed online: https://novaojs.newcastle.edu.au/ojs/index.php/pes/article/view/26
Week 8 Thursday	<u>Commedia dell’Arte</u> <p>Reading: <i>A Servant to Two Masters</i> (available in USC bookstore)</p>
Week 9 Tuesday	<u>Television Comedy</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sitcoms Sketch Shows Animation Viewing : See Blackboard for youtube links <p>Reading: Frank Krutnik and Steve Neale, <i>Definitions, genres and forms</i> from <i>Popular Film and Television Comedy</i> (ARES)</p>
Week 9	<u>Farce</u>

Thursday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hotel Paradiso Reading: Hotel Paradiso by Georges Feydeau translated by Peter Glenville (available in the bookstore)
Assignment 2 – Critical Paper	Examine the function of comedy in performance. What purposes can comedy serve?
Block 4	The Comic Tradition
Week 10 Tuesday	<u>Greek Theatre</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Frogs Reading: <i>The Frogs</i> by Aristophanes. Can be accessed online: http://classics.mit.edu/Aristophanes/frogs.html
Week 10 Thursday	<u>Shakespeare’s Comic Devices</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comedy of Errors Reading: <i>The Comedy of Errors</i> can be accessed online: http://shakespeare.mit.edu/comedy_errors/full.html
Week 11 Tuesday	<u>The comedy of double bodies/ twins in comedy</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Task: Identify examples of twin comedy. How are twins used?
Week 11 Thursday	<u>Restoration Comedy</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Country Wife Reading: William Wycherley’s <i>The Country Wife</i> . Available online at: http://faculty.winthrop.edu/vorderbruegg/winthropweb/current/scripts/CountryWife-acting%20version--revised.pdf
Week 12 Tuesday	<u>Comedy of Manners</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Importance of Being Earnest Reading: <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> by Oscar Wilde. Can be accessed online. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/844/844-h/844-h.htm
Week 12 Thursday	Tracing the traditions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion class
Assignment 3 – Critical Paper	To what extent have the concerns and techniques of comic writers changed with the passage of time. Your response must compare at least one pre- 20 th century example with at least one post 20 th century example.
Block 5	Contemporary Comedy

Week 13 Tuesday	<p><u>Satire: Social and Political</u></p> <p>Reading: <i>Comedy</i> by Andrew Stott, pp 149 – 170 (available via Ares and Joanne Morreale, Jon Stewart and the Daily Show: I thought you were going to be funny from <i>Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-network Era</i> (ARES)</p> <p>Viewing: See Blackboard for youtube links</p>
Week 13 Thursday	<p><u>Theatre and Comedy</u></p> <p>Reading: <i>Clybourne Park</i> by Bruce Norris</p>
Week 14	<p>Contemporary Film</p> <p>Viewing: <i>Bridesmaids</i> (ARES)</p> <p>Reading: Helen Warner's A New Feminist Revolution in Hollywood? Postfeminist Discourse and the Critical Reception of <i>Bridesmaids</i> from <i>Postfeminism and Contemporary Cinema</i></p>
Week 14 Thursday	No Class /Thanksgiving
Week 15 Tuesday	<p><u>The contemporary sitcom</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing: <i>Modern Family</i> • Reading: Christina Vecchia, Of Peerenting, Trophy Wives, and Effeminate Men: <i>Modern Family's</i> Surprisingly Conservative Remediation of the Family Sitcom Genre available at: http://harlotofthearts.com/index.php/harlot/article/view/85/65
Week 15 Thursday	Comic Conclusions

Accessing Reading and Viewing Material

All reading listed above details where it can be accessed either online, via ARES or at the bookstore.

YouTube links for viewing before the lecture will be provided via Blackboard.

All clips shown in lectures will also be made available as YouTube links via Blackboard.

All PowerPoints will be made available via Blackboard after the lecture has taken place.

Final Examination Date:

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://dps.usc.edu/contact/report/>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP)* <http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.