

Meetings: TR 1:30-2:50
M evening, occasional screenings

Professor: **Dirk Eitzen**, Meyran 200, #4297
Office hours: MW 10:00-11:00, TR 3:00-4:00, and by appt.

Course Description:

Drawing on film theory, film criticism, philosophy, social theory, psychology and brain science, this seminar explores the question of the nature and purpose of film comedy. The course will be conducted as a seminar: that is, as a genuine exploration of the topic, through reading, research, and disciplined discussion.

The course has three primary objectives:

1. To introduce some of the major figures in classical and contemporary film theory,
 2. To practice viewing, analyzing, and discussing movies as a means of grappling with the kind of broad questions that engage film theorists,
 3. To guide you in finding your own provisional answers to the question of how film comedy works.
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Requirements and Evaluation:

Weekly Quizzes, 20%

There will be a quiz every Tuesday, to assess how carefully you did the readings and how well you understand them. Questions will typically be drawn from a list that is handed out in advance.

Weekly Blog and Class Participation, 20%

At least one hour before Thursday's class, you will write a short (ca. 250 word) informal blog entry assessing and responding to the week's readings. We will consider and discuss some of these entries in class. I will grade your blog and your class participation on a \checkmark , +, or - scale, with \checkmark being the norm.

Three Process Papers, 30%

At the start of the term, every student will choose or be assigned an important comedy film, to use as a kind of test case over the course of the entire term. Over the course of the term, you will write three short (ca. 5 pg.) formal process papers, analyzing representative scenes from this film: a preliminary theoretical explanation of your own, an assessment of theories covered in the first half of the term, and an assessment of theories covered in the second half.

Two Formal Oral Presentations, 10%

You will also need to give two formal oral presentations (with PowerPoint, ideally) analyzing and explaining scenes from your assigned film: one in the middle of the term, for discussion, and another at the end, to present the theoretical argument you intend to advance in your final paper.

Final Thesis Paper, 25%

The final paper for this class will consist of a 10-15 page term paper that carefully stakes out a position with respect to some theoretical question or issue that we have encountered over the course of the term. Naturally, you will respond to theories we have read but you will likely need to do some additional research, as well. You will also present a preliminary outline of your argument to the class, in the form of a brief PowerPoint presentation.

Attendance

Attendance is required. Every unexcused absence beyond the second will result in a drop in your letter grade. If you must be absent from class, please talk to me in advance. If you miss class due to illness, it is your responsibility to notify me and to make up missed work.

Required Readings:

Textbooks

Martin, Rod A. *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*. London, Ontario: Elsevier Academic Press, 2007.
Voytilla, Stuart and Scott Petri. *Writing the Comedy Film: Make 'Em Laugh*. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2003.

Reserve Readings:

Reserve readings in the syllabus will be available as PDF files on the course's edisk (accessible via myDiplomat). It would be a good idea to print these out and mark them up as you read, since that will be useful not just for seminar discussions, but for your writing assignments. Books and articles from which the reserve readings are taken are listed at the end of this syllabus.

SYLLABUS:

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|---|------|--|
| R | 9/3 | Introduction
Purpose of course
Introductions
Clips: <i>Borat</i> , <i>Bringing Up Baby</i> , <i>The Rock</i>
Selecting films for student presentations |
| T | 9/8 | Preliminary Explorations
<i>Writing Assignment 1 due</i> |
| R | 9/10 | Clips: <i>Goldrush</i>
Presentations:
Charles Musser on Chaplin
Noël Carroll on Chaplin
In-class essay: 250-word assessment
Introduction to upcoming readings |
| T | 9/15 | Evolutionary Explanation of Film Comedy
<i>Reading assignment due</i>
Eitzen, 2 essays; Bagley |

- R 9/17 Quiz on readings
 Discussion of readings
Blog response due
 Discussion of blog responses
 Student Presentation
 Introduction to upcoming readings
- T 9/22 **Practical Theory**
Reading assignment due
 Voytilla and Petri
 Quiz on readings
 Discussion of readings
- R 9/24 *Blog response due*
 Discussion of blog responses
 Student Presentation
 Introduction to upcoming readings
- M 9/28 **Comedy as a Genre**
 Screening: *The Lady Eve* (Sturges, 1941)
- T 9/29 *Reading assignment due*
 Frye, 2 essays; Cavell; Rowe
 Quiz on readings
 Discussion of readings
- R 10/1 *Blog response due*
 Discussion of blog responses
 Student Presentation
 Introduction to upcoming readings
- T 10/6 **Classical Theories**
Reading assignment due
 Eisenstein, 2 essays; Burch;
 Kracauer, 2 essays; Bazin, 2 essays
 Quiz on readings
 Discussion of readings
- R 10/8 *Blog response due*
 Discussion of blog responses
 Student Presentation
 Introduction to upcoming readings
- M 9/28 **Psychoanalytic Theories**
 Screening: *The Disorderly Orderly* (Tashlin/Lewis, 1964)
- T 10/13 *Reading assignment due*
 Freud; Bukatman
 Quiz on readings
 Discussion of readings
- R 10/15 *Blog response due*
 Discussion of blog responses
 Student Presentation
 Introduction to upcoming readings
- T 10/20 *Fall Break*

- R 10/22 **The Sociology of Humor**
 Screening: *The General* (Keaton, 1926)
- T 10/27 *Reading assignment due*
 Bergson; Billig
 Quiz on readings
 Discussion of readings
- R 10/29 *Blog response due*
 Discussion of blog responses
 Student Presentation
 Introduction to upcoming readings
- T 11/3 **The Psychology of Humor**
Reading assignment due
 Martin, chs. 1-3
 Quiz on readings
 Discussion of readings
- R 11/5 *Blog response due*
 Discussion of blog responses
 Student Presentation
 Introduction to upcoming readings
- T 11/10 *Reading assignment due*
 Martin, chs. 4-6
 Quiz on readings
 Discussion of readings
- R 11/12 *Blog response due*
 Discussion of blog responses
 Student Presentation
 Introduction to upcoming readings
- T 11/17 *Reading assignment due*
 Martin, chs. 7-8; Carroll
 Quiz on readings
 Discussion of readings
- R 11/19 *Blog response due*
 Discussion of blog responses
 Student Presentation
 Introduction to upcoming readings
- T 11/24 Screening: *A Short Film about Love* (Kieslowski, 1986)
- R 11/26 *Thanksgiving Break*
- T 12/1 Presentations
 R 12/3 Presentations
 T 12/8 Presentations
 R 12/10 Presentations
 F 12/18 Final Papers Due

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Bazin, André. "Charlie Chaplin," in *What is Cinema?* vol. 1, translated by Hugh Gray. Berkeley: U of California Pr, 1967.
- Bazin, André. "Monsieur Hulot and Time." *Bright Lights Film Journal*, accessed 10 Aug 2009 <<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/64/64bazintati.html>>.
- Begley, Sharon. "Don't Blame the Caveman: Why Do We Rape, Kill and Sleep Around?" *Newsweek* 29 June 2009.
- Bergson, Henri. "Laughter," in *Comedy*, edited by Wylie Sypher. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994.
- Billig, Michael. "Embarrassment, Humour and the Social Order," in *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. London: SAGE Publications, 2005.
- Bukatman, Scott. "Paralysis in Motion: Jerry Lewis's Life as a Man," in *Comedy/Cinema/Theory*, edited by Andrew S. Horton. Berkeley: U of California Pr, 1991.
- Burch, Noël. "Structures of Aggression," in *Theory of Film Practice*, translated by Helen R. Lane. Princeton UP, 1973.
- Carroll, Noël. "Horror and Humor," in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge UP, 2001.
- Carroll, Noël. "Notes on the Sight Gag," in *Theorizing the Moving Image*. Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Eisenstein, Sergei. "A Dialectical Approach to Film Form," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, edited and translated by Jay Leyda. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1949.
- Eisenstein, Sergei. "A Few Thoughts about Soviet Comedy," in *Notes of a Film Director*. New York: Dover Publications, 1970.
- Eitzen, Dirk. "Comedy and Classicism," in *Film Theory and Philosophy*, edited by Richard Allen and Murray Smith. Oxford: Clarendon Pr, 1997.
- Eitzen, Dirk. "The Emotional Basis of Film Comedy," in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*, edited by Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Jokes and the Species of the Comic," in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, translated and edited by James Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton, 1960.
- Frye, Northrop. "Comic Fictional Modes" and "The Mythos of Spring: Comedy," in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton UP, 1957.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. "The Fortuitous" and "Dialogue," in *Theory of Film*. Oxford University Press, 1960.
- Martin, Rod A. *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*. London, Ontario: Elsevier Academic Press, 2007.
- Musser, Charles. "Work, Ideology, and Chaplin's Tramp," in *Resisting Images: Essays on Cinema and History*, edited by Robert Sklar and Charles Musser. Temple UP, 1990.
- Rowe, Kathleen. "Comedy, Melodrama and Gender: Theorizing the Genres of Laughter," in *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, edited by Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Voytilla, Stuart and Scott Petri. *Writing the Comedy Film: Make 'Em Laugh*. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2003.
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