

ART HISTORY 3876:
THEORIES OF LAUGHTER
(ART AND HUMOR)

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Text: Professor pack xeroxed collation of writings.

Synopsis: Course consist of readings in the philosophy of humor and comedy, viewing visual material in class (photography, video, film, and painting). Emphasis is the class's discussion of material so your participation in every class discussion is important.

Evaluation: Grading will be on the following:

1. Two papers—midterm paper of minimum of 6 pages due on the seventh week of class and final Paper 6 pages minimum due the last class (75% of grade).
2. M.A. art history grads must do an 8 page minimum research paper in addition to the above 2 papers OR a 15 minute oral presentation at the last class session.
3. Group presentations in class discussion (25% of grade). Class will be divided into groups (number and size dependent upon enrollment) and these groups will be comment upon and lead discussions on the course readings.

Attendance: Roll will be taken; miss more than three class with out confirmed excuse (medical, etc.) and its an automatic NCR. No Incompletes unless written verification of problem.

Notes:

ART AND HUMOR: CLASS READINGS

DATE	DESCRIPTION/READINGS TO BE DONE
9/4	<p>Introduction to course; no readings; discuss satire & caricature. View video tape: <i>Crumb</i>.</p>
9/11	<p>The Nature of Play (as opposed to work). The theory of Johan Huizinga. Art as "just playing around." View video: William Wegman's <i>Programs 1 & 2: Selected Early Works</i>, & his <i>The World of Photography</i>.</p> <p>Have Read: "Play" an excerpt from <i>Leisure and Popular Culture in Transition</i> by Thomas Kando, plus miscellaneous Notes plus Johan Huizinga's "The Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon," from <i>Homo Ludens</i> (1944).</p>
9/18	<p>Street photography. Garry Winogrand and Elliot Erwit's work; class discussion.</p> <p>Have Read: Paul E. McGhee, excerpt from <i>Humor: Its Origin and Development</i>, Ian Walker, "Humour in Photography," <i>Creative Camera</i> (April 1985) and Ben Lifson, "Garry Winogrand's American Comedy" from <i>Aperture</i> #86 (1982).</p>
9/25	<p>Early Theories of Comedy.</p> <p>Have Read: Lane Cooper, "The Effect of Comedy—Aristotle," <i>An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy</i> (1922) and Scott C. Shershow, "From Irony to Transcendence," <i>Laughing Matters</i> (1953), and "Notes of Origins of Comedy and terminology thereof" in xerox pack. Viewing and discussion of visual satire and caricature and Pop Art by Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, etc.</p>
10/2	<p>View videos: George Kuchar, <i>Weather Diaries #1 & 3</i>; Ilene Segalove, <i>The Mom Tapes</i>, & <i>Why I Got into TV and Other Stories</i> by Segalove. Discussion of these tapes.</p> <p>Have Read: Margaret Morse, "Cyclone from Oz on George Kuchar's 'Weather Diary 1'," and Steve Seid, "Making Contact: The Video Tapes of George Kuchar."</p>
10/9	<p>Laughter, Its Possible Origins.</p> <p>Have Read: Albert Rapp, "Introduction," <i>The Origins of Wit and Humor</i> (1951) and Anthony Ludovici, "Chapter III," <i>The Secret of Laughter</i> (1933) View video: Vanalyne Green, <i>The Spy in the House that Ruth Built</i>.</p>

- 10/16 The Physiological Aspects of Laughter.
- Have Read: Dr. Donald W. Black, M.D., "Laughter," *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Dec. 7, 1984), "Chapter 5," *The Comedian* (anony.), and Melvin Maddocks, "Do All Comedians Want to Play Hamlet?"
View: Richard Pryor comedy tape.
- Six page (double space typed) midterm paper due.
Have read: although no reading assignment this week so you can work on your paper, you might want to read ahead for next week.
- 10/23 Feature length: view David Bryne, *True Stories*; class discussion of film.
- Have Read: "Laughing All the Way to the Revolution: The New Feminist Comics" by Mary McNamara and excerpt from *Subversive Laughter: The Liberating Power of Comedy* by Ron Jenkins.
- 10/30 No class: Critique week.
- 11/6 Henri Bergson's theory of laughter.
- Have Read: Henri Bergson, excerpts from *Laughter* (1931).
- 11/13 Film Comedy, the Application of Bergson's theories.
- Have Read: James Agee, *Comedy's Greatest Era*, Arthur Schopenhauer, excerpt from *The World as Will and Representation* (1818).
View Buston Keaton's film *Balloonatic*, class discussion.
- 11/20 Verbal Humor and Conceptual Art.
View video: John Baldessari, *John Baldessari Sings LeWitt* and *Ed Henderson Reconstructs Movie Scenarios* and slides of miscellaneous conceptual art: Baldessari, Robert Cumming, etc.; class discussion.
- Have Read: Albert Rapp, "Conundrums," and "Puns" from *The Origins of Wit and Humor* (1951) and "Zaniness," from *Cute, Quaint, Hungry, and Romantic* by Daniel Harris.
- 11/27 Freud I. A Psychological Theory of Humor.
- Have Read: Notes on Freud's Theory of Jokes and Sigmund Freud, "A. Analytic Part," *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905).
Views videos: Tony Oursler's *The Loner & The Weak Bullet*, plus stand-up comedians.

12/4

Freud II. Jokes and the Dreamwork; and a feminist criticism of Freud.

View video: *I Love Lucy Show* and *Ernie Kovacs*.

Have Read: Freud, "B. Synthetic Part," & "Jokes and the Species of the Comic,"
Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious (1905) & Patricia Mellencamp,
"Discourses of Gracie and Lucy".

12/11

A Postmodernist Theory of Comedy (idealist theory vs materialist theory of humor).

Final papers due.

M.A. art history students' oral presentations

Have Read: Elizabeth Wright's "Theory in praxis: comedy as discourse,"
Postmodern Brecht: a re-presentation (1988).