School of the Arts and Media

ARTS2064
Film Genres: Comedian Comedy
SESSION 1, 2014

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Course Staff

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Consultation time

My office hour is Monday 1pm-2pm. To arrange to see me at an alternative time contact me by email. I am not available on Fridays.

Course Details

4.5 hours per week (1.5 hr lecture, 1.5 hour screening, 1.5 hr tutorial)
12 weeks
Lecture/Screening: Monday 10.00am-1.00pm
Pioneer International Theatre
Tutorials: Tuesday 9.00-10.30 am, 10.30 am-12.00 pm Electrical Engineering 221

6 Units of credit
Lectures and Tutorials commence in week 2

Assessment

1. Reading and Writing Exercise 1,500 words. Due Thursday 3rd April 4pm. 25% of final grade. (Grades available 24th April)
2. Individual Classroom Contribution 10% of final grade
3. Collaborative tutorial presentation 30% of final grade.
4. Research Essay. Due Thursday 5th June 4pm. 45% of final grade.

Course Texts

1. School Course Reader/weekly readings can be downloaded from Moodle
2. Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, Popular Film and Television Comedy, Routledge, 1990 (recommended).
4. Lisa Trahair, The Comedy of Philosophy: Sense and Nonsense in Early Cinematic Slapstick, SUNY, 2007 (recommended). You are also encouraged to pursue your own research interests and to read as widely as possible; a reading list can be found at end of this guide.

Course Description

This course explores some of the major theoretical approaches to the study of film genre through in-depth analysis of particular genres. The course explores key topics in genre studies: ideas of popular and cultural value; the ways that industrial, social, technological, and aesthetic factors shape the development, circulation, and reception of a film genre; and the movement of genres across and between different media. Genre ‘case-studies’ vary from year to year and may include: the gangster film, comedy, exploitation and B-grade cinemas, documentary, and the film musical.

In 2014 the course examines a genre of film known as comedian comedy. It investigates the emergent conventions of the genre and the way different comic performers have adapted and modified them throughout the history of cinema. The course also considers these conventions in relation to theories of the comic, attending to key works in philosophy, psychoanalysis and literature as well as film studies. The subject is both a case study of cinematic genre and an investigation of what is at stake in comic performance.

• In order to pass this course, you must make a serious attempt at ALL assessment tasks.
What you need to know

• FOR ALL SCHOOL POLICIES AND GUIDELINES REGARDING APPLYING FOR EXTENSIONS, PLAGIARISM, ATTENDANCE, EXAMS AND DISCONTINUING YOUR STUDY CLICK ON THIS LINK: https://sam.arts.unsw.edu.au/students/resources/policies-guidelines/

• SCHOOL OFFICE
School of the Arts and Media
Level 3, Robert Webster Building
Email: empa@unsw.edu.au

• ATTENDANCE
To pass this course you are required to attend at least 80% of lectures, screenings and tutorials. Attendance at lectures and tutorials will be recorded. If you are more than 10 minutes late, you will be deemed not to have attended. Failure to meet attendance requirements will result in failure of the course.

• SUBMISSION OF WORK
Research essays should be on the due date submitted in hard copy via the assignment drop boxes on Level 3 of the Robert Webster Building as well as uploaded to Turn-it-in on Moodle. Under no circumstances will your tutor accept work that is emailed to them.

• EXTENSIONS
In the case of illness and misadventure you may apply to the Course Convenor for an extension of the due date. Work or family commitments, religious holidays or work due in other courses are not acceptable reasons for extension or Special Consideration requests. Evidence of significant progress in an assessment task must be demonstrated if asking for an extension due to emergency or illness close to the submission date. The extension procedure is as follows: A student seeking an extension should apply through the Faculty’s online extension tool available in LMS before the due time/date for the assessment task.
• The Course Convenor should respond to the request within two working days.
• The Course Convenor can only approve an extension of up to five days. A student requesting an extension of more than five days should complete an application for Special Consideration.
• The Course Convenor advises their decision through the online extension tool.
• If a student is granted an extension, failure to comply will result in a penalty. The penalty will be invoked one minute past the approved extension time.
• A student who missed an assessed activity held within class contact hours should apply for Special Consideration via myUNSW.
• This procedure does not apply to assessment tasks that take place during regular class hours or any task specifically identified by the Course Authority as not subject to extension requests.
• For more information, see the FASS extension protocols on the SAM policies and guidelines webpage: https://sam.arts.unsw.edu.au/students/resources/policies-guidelines/

• SPECIAL CONSIDERATION
In the case of more serious or ongoing illness or misadventure, you will need to apply for Special Consideration. For information on Special Consideration please go to this URL: https://my.unsw.edu.au/student/atoz/SpecialConsideration.html
Students who are prevented from attending a substantial amount of the course may be advised to apply to withdraw without penalty. This will only be approved in the most extreme and properly documented cases.

• LATE PENALTIES
LATE WORK: PLEASE NOTE THAT NEW RULES APPLY FOR ALL COURSES IN SAM FROM 2012. If your assignment is submitted after the due date, a penalty of 3% per day, including Saturday, Sunday and Public Holidays will be imposed for up to 2 weeks. Your marks will be reduced by each day the essay is late. If it is not submitted within 2 weeks of the due date, it will receive 0 marks and you will be deemed to have failed.
Course Readings and Screenings

Week 2
10th March
Introduction


Compulsory reading
(SCR, p. 29)

Recommended reading

Week 3
17th March
Early Film Comedy and Mack Sennett

Early cinematic slapstick films will be screened throughout the lecture

Compulsory reading

Recommended reading

Week 4
24th March
The two-reelers: the second phase of silent film comedy

Charlie Chaplin, The Immigrant (1917), Fatty Arbuckle, Coney Island (1917) Buster Keaton, One Week (1920) dir. Edward Cline & Buster Keaton Laurel and Hardy Big Business (1929) dir. James L. Horne & Leo McCarey

Compulsory reading

Recommended reading
Barr, Charles, Laurel and Hardy, University of California Press, 1967. (SCR, p. 92)

Week 5
31st March
The Genteel tradition

Harold Lloyd, Safety Last (1923) 74 mins, dir: Fred Newmeyer and Sam Taylor

Compulsory reading

Recommended reading
Neale and Krutnik, Popular Film and Television Comedy, pp. 121-131 (Library-High Use).
Walter Kerr, The Silent Clowns, ch. 11 (Library-High Use).
Week 6  Comedy and narrative
7th April  Buster Keaton, The General (1927), 77 mins, dir: Buster Keaton and Clyde Bruckman

Compulsory reading

Recommended reading

Week 7  Comedy and the bawdy
14th April  Charlie Chaplin, 1931, City Lights, dir: Charles Chaplin, 87 mins

Compulsory reading

Recommended reading

EASTER BREAK 18TH-27TH APRIL

Week 8  Sound Comedy
28th April  The Marx Brothers, Duck Soup, dir: Leo McCarey, 1933, 68 mins.

Compulsory reading

Recommended reading

Week 9  Screwball Comedy and Romance
5th May  It Happened One Night, 1934, dir: Frank Capra, 105 mins

Compulsory reading

Recommended reading
Stuart Klavans, ‘Habitual Remarriage: The Ends of Happiness in The Palm Beach Story’ in Rupert Read and Jerry Goodenough (eds), Film as Philosophy: Essays on Cinema After Wittgenstein and Cavell, Basingstoke: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2005, pp.149-163. (Blackboard)

‘What Becomes of Thinking on Film?’ (Stanley Cavell in Conversation with Andrew Klevan)’ in Rupert Read and Jerry Goodenough (eds), Film as Philosophy: Essays on Cinema After Wittgenstein and Cavell, Basingstoke: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2005, pp. 167-209. (Blackboard)
Week 10  The Comic Auteur  

Compulsory reading

Recommended reading
Bukatman, Scott, ‘Paralysis in Motion: Jerry Lewis’s Life as a Man’ in Andrew Horton (ed.), *Comedy, Cinema, Theory*, University of California Press, 1991. (Library-High Use)

Week 11  Satirical Comedy  
19th May  Peter Sellers, *Dr Strangelove, or how I learned to stop worrying and love the bomb*, 1964 dir: Stanley Kubrick, 91 mins

Compulsory reading

Recommended reading

Week 12  Comedy and Identity  

Compulsory reading

Recommended reading

Week 13  Comedy and Stupidity  
2nd June  Jim Carrey, *Dumb and Dumber* (1994), dir: Peter Farrelly, 101 mins

Compulsory reading

Recommended reading
ASSESSMENT

Note about referencing and formatting: A style guide will be made available on Blackboard and students must consult it in preparing their work for assessment. All work must be correctly formatted and referenced. Work that is not will be returned to be fixed before it is marked and late penalties will apply.

| Assessment task         | Length        | Weight | Time | Learning outcomes assessed                                                                 | Graduate attributes assessed                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Due date               |
|-------------------------|---------------|--------|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                       |
| Reading Exercise        | 1500 words    | 25%    | 22.5 | • recall key debates that have taken place around the genres studied                                                                                   | • An understanding of the aesthetic, technical and cultural dimensions of film  
• The ability to recognise the different interpretive frameworks and value systems that inform understandings of film in various social and cultural discourses  
• The skills to analyse and interpret written and audio-visual texts                                                                                           | 4pm Thursday 3rd April |
| Tutorial presentation   |               | 20%    | 15   | • work in small groups and teams to undertake small research tasks and present findings                                                            | • An understanding of the methods of analysis and thinking specific to the discipline of film studies  
• The organisational and communication skills required for effective and collaborative work  
• An understanding of the aesthetic, technical and cultural dimensions of film  
• The skills to analyse and interpret written and audio-visual texts                                                                                           |                       |
| Individual classroom    |               | 10%    | 7.5  | • understand key issues and debates in film genre study and theory                                                                                 | • An understanding of the methods of analysis and thinking specific to the discipline of film studies  
• An understanding of the aesthetic, technical and cultural dimensions of film  
• The organisational and communication skills required for effective and collaborative work                                                                                                                   | Ongoing               |
| contributions           |               |        |      | • recall key debates that have taken place around the genres studied                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                       |
|                         |               |        |      | • recognise some of the ways that aesthetic, technological, social, and industrial factors have shaped the development of the genres studied       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                       |
|                         |               |        |      | • understand key issues and debates in film genre study and theory                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                       |
|                         |               |        |      | • identify the key features of the genres studied in the course                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                       |
|                         |               |        |      | • develop a critical argument in relation to debates raised in the course                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                       |
| Research Essay          | 2500 words    | 45%    | 40.3 | • contextualise and articulate their own critical position in spoken and written form                                                            | • Skills in scholarly research as applied to the field of film studies  
• The ability to recognise the different interpretive frameworks and value systems that inform understandings of film in various social and cultural discourses  
• The skills to analyse and interpret written and audio-visual texts  
• An understanding of the methods of analysis and thinking specific to the discipline of film studies                                                                                                    | 4pm Thursday 5th June  |
ASSESSMENT TASK 1

Reading Exercise
Due Thursday 3rd April 4pm.
1500 words
25%

Your work must be submitted to both the school drop box on Level 3 of Webster Building and on Turn it in by the due date.

Instructions
For this task students are asked to choose three texts from the following list and provide a 500 word summary of each. The word limit for this exercise is strict and work that exceeds it will be heavily penalized.


The reading exercise focuses on some of the most challenging readings in the course and aims to provide focus to your reading. It will also help you to develop your skills in succinctly explaining the key features of an argument. This is an important skill for essay writing. Assessment will be based primarily on your capacity to comprehend the text. While you are invited to undertake critical evaluation, for this exercise such evaluation is secondary to comprehension.

Comprehension: You will need to read each text at least three times. First, skim through it. Second, underline key points. After your second reading note what you remember about the text and try to succinctly describe in a couple of sentences its central argument. Then go back through the text carefully, locate the key ideas/concepts and make sure you understand them. At this point, focus on the logic of the argument, noting how details support that logic. Note how the argument is structured and identify its turning points. Pay particular attention to the division of the work into sections and consider how each section comprises a significant component of the argument. You may need to do more research on difficult terms in order to understand them.

Critical Evaluation: Where relevant, you might consider such questions as: Are there any gaps or oversights in the argument? What are the ramifications of the argument? What theoretical/philosophical frameworks inform the argument? What is it arguing against? What are the limitations or advantages of the perspective taken by the author? How might this reading be of use in your own engagement with film? You may also respond to this last question by briefly applying relevant concepts to your own film viewing experience.

Remember: This exercise requires you to be concise, so you must remain strictly within the word limit of 500 words. After having responded to the instructions above you will probably find that you have a lot more than 500 words for each text. Now you have to synthesise the main points while doing your best not to generalize and not to diminish the nuance and sophistication of the text.

Assessment Criteria:
—Capacity to read carefully and understand complex theoretical scholarship
—Identification of the structure of the argument
—Identification of key ideas and concepts
—Presentation of assignment in a coherently written and grammatically and typographically correct form
—Consistent and thorough referencing of sources
ASSESSMENT TASK 2
Collaborative Tutorial Presentation
Facilitation: 15 minutes per person
20%

This task is intended to allow students to develop skills in collaborative research and debate and contextualise and articulate their own critical position in spoken and written form. It will enhance understanding of the methods of analysis and thinking specific to both the genre of comedian comedy and the discipline of film studies.

Assessment criteria
— identification of arguments and ideas presented in set readings
— critical evaluation of arguments and ideas presented in set readings
— application of ideas and concepts to specific examples
— evidence of working together as a group
— management and supervision of productive class discussion

ASSESSMENT TASK 3
Individual classroom contribution
10%

This assessment task will involve students responding to collaborative tutorial presentations on one occasion over the course of the semester. Responses should take the form of a summary and evaluation of the most significant arguments articulated by presenters, raising points from the lecture and reading not adequately covered in the presentation but pertinent to the weekly topic, and/or further comments about the relationship between the film and the theoretical arguments made about it. The task will enhance your understanding of key issues and debates in the study of film genre, engage you in the identification of key features of comedian comedy and enhance your understanding of the key arguments that relate to them. Students will not know in advance which weeks they will be assessed so it is important to come to class each week fully prepared.

Assessment Criteria
— demonstration of careful reading and listening
— demonstration of skills in independent and critical thinking
— understanding of key issues and debates in film genre.

ASSESSMENT TASK 4
Research Essay
2500 words
Due 4pm Thursday 5th June
45%

Your work must be submitted to both the school drop box on Level 3 of Webster Building and on Turn it in by the due date. Students who want their work returned with comments must include a stamped self-addressed envelope with submission.

The research essay is designed to evaluate both your understanding of the broader concerns of the course and your ability to focus on significant debates and issues. Essay questions will be distributed separately in Week 6. Marks will be assigned in relation to evidence of written, analytical and critical skills, the research undertaken and the formulation and coherence of the argument presented. Students will be presented with a marking template that will be used to assess their written work when essay questions and instructions for assessment tasks are distributed.
Bibliography

Genre Theory and Theory of Film Genre

Comedy—General

Film Comedy—General
Petric, Vlada, ‘Film Scholarship and Impressionistic Film Criticism’ a review of Walter Kerr’s *The Silent Clowns*, Quarterly Review of Film Studies, May 1976.

### Mack Sennett and Early Cinematic Slapstick


### Women and Comedy


Dolan, F. E., ‘Why are Nuns Funny?’, Huntington Library Quarterly, vol. 70, no. 4, pp. 509-553.


Sassatelli, R., ‘Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, Gaze and Technology in Film Culture’, Theory, Culture and Society, 28/5, 2011, 123-143.


Romantic Comedy


Comedians and Comedian Comedy

Buster Keaton

For an extended bibliography see: http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/keaton.html


Eberwein, Robert T., ‘Comedy and the Film within the Film’, Wide Angle

Gilliatt, Penelope, To Wit: Skin and Bones of Comedy, Charles Scribner’s Sons 1990

Hogue, Peter, ‘Eye of the Storm: Buster Keaton


Shelton, Ron, Interview in Sight and Sound discussing Buster Keaton

Stam, Robert, ‘Allegories of Spectatorship’, Reflexivity in Film and Literature from Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard, Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1985. (Sherlock, Jr)


Sweeney, Kevin W., ‘Agee, Comic Discourse, and Buster Keaton’s Cops’, Film Criticism, vol XIII no. 1, Fall 1988. (special issue on comedy).

**Charlie Chaplin**
Robinson, David, Chaplin, His Life and Art, Paladin, 1986.

**Harold Lloyd**

**Jerry Lewis**
Bukatman, Scott, ‘Paralysis in Motion: Jerry Lewis’s Life as a Man’ in Horton.
Henderson, Brian, ‘Cartoon and Narrative in the Films fo Frank Tashlin and Preston Sturges’ in Horton.
Selig, Michael, ‘The Nutty Professor: A “Problem” in Film Scholarship’, The Velvet Light Trap, no. 26, Fall 1990.
Laurel and Hardy

Mae West

The Marx Brothers

Peter Sellers/Dr Strangelove
Baxter, Peter, ‘The One Woman’, *Wide Angle*, vol. 6 no. 1.
Firth, Vincent, ‘It’s a Sellers Market’, *Film Review*, vol. 24 no. 4, April 1974.
Hoberman, J., ‘When Dr No met Dr Strangelove’, *Sight and Sound*, vol. 3 no. 12, December 1993.
Milne, Tom, ‘Dr. Strangelove’, *Sight and Sound*, vol. 33 no. 2 1964.
Southern, Terry, ‘Strangelove Outtake: Notes from the War Room’, *Grand Street*, no. 49.
Thompson, David, ‘The Rest is Sellers’, *Film Comment*, vol. 16 no. 5, Sept-Oct 1980.
Steve Martin
Barth, Jack, ‘All of Him’, *Film Comment*, vol. 20 no. 5, October 1984.
Fong-Torres, Ben, ‘Why is this man smirking’, *American Film*, vol. VII no. 8, June 1982.

Woody Allen

Jim Carrey
**COURSE AIMS**

This course aims to develop the following skills and knowledges:

- an understanding of key concepts and debates in film genre study and theory
- a knowledge of the history and development of particular film genres
- an understanding of the interrelations between industrial, technological, social and aesthetic factors as they impact on the development of particular film genres
- Skills in collaborative research and debate
- skills in independent and critical thinking through close analysis of specific debates in film genre study
- an awareness of some of the research methods and approaches required to undertake independent research into a film genre and its history
- a broader knowledge and understanding of the discipline of Film Studies

**As an introduction to the genre of Comedian Comedy the objectives of the course are**

- To introduce students to the genre of comedian comedy both in itself and as a point of contrast to the aesthetics of classical Hollywood cinema.
- To develop students’ understanding of what comic performance in cinema involves.
- To broaden students awareness of the relationship between cinematic objects and philosophical inquiry, which in this instance concerns the nature of the comic.

**Student Learning outcomes**

On successful completion of the course students will be able to:

- understand key issues and debates in film genre study and theory
- identify the key features of the genres studied in the course
- recall key debates that have taken place around the genres studied
- develop a critical argument in relation to debates raised in the course
- conduct and deploy research in film genre studies
- work in small groups and teams to undertake small research tasks and present findings
- contextualise and articulate their own critical position in spoken and written form
- recognise some of the ways that aesthetic, technological, social, and industrial factors have shaped the development of the genres studied

**Graduate Attributes**

1. an understanding of the methods of analysis and thinking specific to the discipline of film studies
2. a knowledge of the historical development of film as a both a specific medium and as part of a constantly evolving media landscape
3. an understanding of the aesthetic, technical and aesthetic dimensions of film
4. the skills to analyse and interpret written and audio-visual texts
5. the ability to link creative production with theoretical and critical knowledge
6. the conceptual and organisational skills required to undertake self-directed learning the organisational and communication skills required for effective and creative collaborative work

These attributes align with a number of the BA’s Graduate Attributes, in particular:

- The skills involved in scholarly enquiry
- The capacity for analytical and critical thinking and for creative problem solving
- The ability to engage in independent and reflective learning
- Information Literacy – the skills to locate, evaluate and use relevant information
- The capacity for enterprise, initiative and creativity
- An appreciation of, and respect for, diversity
- A capacity to contribute to, and work within, the international community
- The skills required for collaborative and multidisciplinary work
- An appreciation of, and a responsiveness to, change
- A respect for ethical practice and social responsibility
- The skills of effective communication

Students will be supported in developing the above attributes through:

- Course planning and documentation
- Varied assessment strategies
- Dynamic workshop exercises
- Learning and teaching strategies that include individual and group work
- Continued feedback and course evaluation
Rationale for the inclusion of content and teaching approach
The rationale for this course aligns with many of the aims and objectives of the Film Studies major. It builds on the foundational knowledges in Film Studies that students gain in the level 1 courses (skills in film analysis; introductory knowledge of the history of film and cinema; an awareness of the importance of national and international contexts for filmmaking) and develops these knowledges through the close study of particular genres and by raising and exploring questions about popular cinema(s) and cultural value. Through its focus on the interrelations between industrial, technological, social and aesthetic factors and their role in shaping film genres, it develops students’ understandings of the historical development of film as both a specific medium and as part of a constantly evolving media landscape. By demonstrating some of the research methodologies deployed in genre studies and in studies of film history more generally, it provides students with some of the critical skills required for level 3 Film Studies courses. In addition, and in line with the aims of our level 2 courses, Film Genres allows students to practice and develop more generic skills such as theoretical and practical project planning, academic research, critical thinking and writing skills, and skills in communication and in collaborative work.

Teaching Strategies
• Film screenings provide the focus of the course and will take place each week after the lecture. Films have been selected in order to demonstrate how the aesthetics of cinematic comedy has developed since the invention of cinema in 1895 and to introduce students to the work of the most significant comic performers in the twentieth century (Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Jerry Lewis, Woody Allen and Jim Carrey, to name a few). Particular emphasis is given to the comedy of the silent era because it was in this period that the distinctively visual components of the cinematic comedy were developed.
• Lectures are designed to provide a context for film screenings by referring to the impact of cultural and institutional factors on a given comedian’s work and by focusing on the specific comic strategies developed by the comedian in response to them. Lectures will also suggest ways of theorizing such strategies. They will thus identify how particular films contribute to cinematic comedy, explain relevant concepts, and discuss aspects of cinematic form and style.
• The basis of tutorials will be student-led discussion. In addition to facilitating discussion in a designated week, students will be assessed on their participation in tutorials. For further details of how such participation will be assessed see Assessment Task 3. Tutorials are thus designed to ensure that students develop the capacity to think independently about the course material and come to class adequately prepared to discuss it.
• Consultation times are listed at the front of this course guide. Students are encouraged to see me either during these hours or by appointment to discuss the course in general, reading and writing exercises and essays. I am also available for more general discussion about the Film Major and Film Honours.

Approaches to learning in the course
The course assists student learning about cinema through the lecture program, set readings, the formulation of essay questions and the production of a course bibliography.
• group learning forms the basis of tutorial discussions where students are expected to learn from each other.
• independent learning is considered to have taken place when students a) undertake independent research either by examining a broader cluster of films than those listed in the course or ferreting out reference material not included in the bibliography b) develop their own point of focus in relation to the material under consideration and demonstrate its relevance to academic inquiry.
• students are expected to attend all lectures and tutorials and to take notes in both. You are also encouraged to take notes either during or immediately after film screenings.
• students are expected to undertake all compulsory readings listed in the course program. You are expected to undertake further reading for essays by consulting the course bibliography and through independent research.