WHAT’S SO FUNNY ABOUT NEW YORK?
H28.0632.00
Summer Session II 2007--TWTh: 10:00-12:00
Cornelia Cody
c37@nyu.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday 12:15 to 1:30

GRADING: Attendance, class participation, quizzes: 25%
There is a zero absence policy for this class.
Response papers: 25%
Final presentation: 25%
Final paper: 25%

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Weekly readings:
   • make sure to note when readings are due;
   • most readings are in Course Packet to be purchased at Advance Copy Center,
     522 La Guardia Place (212.388.1001);
   • additional purchases:
     Neil Simon, Brighton Beach Memoirs (to be purchased anywhere)
     E. B. White, Here is New York or Essays of E. B. White (to be purchased
     anywhere)

2. Weekly response papers:
   • Students must see one relevant live performance, current film, or exhibit a
     week.
   • 2 to 3-page papers (TYPED) reacting to/analyzing a live performance, current
     film or exhibit seen that week (due each Thursday);
   • points to focus on:
     • Is the performance a NYC performance? Is it funny?
     • Why? What does it tell you about NYC? About humor?
     • How does/do the performer(s), film, exhibit, etc. speak to the NYC
       aesthetic, mythology, culture?
     • How is NYC performed in that particular performance?
     • How does the performance speak to, address, affirm or negate issues and
       points brought up in class?
     • Papers are graded on a 1-5 scale (5=A).
     • Papers are required for Weeks 1, 3, 4, and 5.
     • Papers must be turned in on time.

3. The Big Bang (7/18)
   • Actors to be assigned: two groups
   • To be performed

4. Mongrel: The Life and Words of Dorothy Parker (7/19)
• Round Table characters to be assigned:
  S. J. Perelman   Edna Ferber
  H. L. Mencken   Robert Sherwood (*The Petrified Forest*)
  Harold Ross    James Thurber
  Robert Benchley Tallulah Bankhead
  Alexander Woollcott Anita Loos
  George Kaufman Franklin Pierce Adams

5. Personal experience narrative:
   • In order to get a feel for the ethnographic, each student will collect (by taping)
     and transcribe a personal experience narrative from an informant.
   • Students will be provided with a standard release form.
   • Three pages, maximum; typed, double-spaced.
   • Subject: New York City.
   • Due: Thursday, July 5 (Week 2).

6. Required movies/TV (films may be at Bobst or checked out of any video store):
   • *The Producers* by Mel Brooks
   • *Annie Hall* by Woody Allen
   • *When Harry Met Sally* by Rob Reiner
   • at least one episode of *Seinfeld*

7. Stand-Up New York (not required but STRONGLY urged):
   • the opportunity to perform 3 minutes of standup at Stand-Up New York (78th
     and B’Way);
   • Monday, July 23 at 7:00;
   • attendance required even if you are not performing;
   • no cover charge, two-drink minimum (except for comics);
   • please bring many friends.

8. Final Paper
   • Pick a NY topic of choice.
   • Research and write a 7 to 10 page paper on topic.

9. Final oral presentation on “New York Humor” topic of choice:
   • 10 minute lecture presented to the class on final paper topic;
   • MUST include slides or video or other supporting materials;
   • written version of the lecture should be in coherent, finished form and
     handed in immediately after presentation;
   • presentations will follow an academic conference format;
   • see below for some topic suggestions.

WEEK ONE: What Is the Course About?

READINGS (due Thursday, 6/26):


Friend, Tad: “What’s So Funny?” The New Yorker, 11/11/02

Gopnik, Adam: “The City and the Pillars,” The New Yorker, 9/24/01


1. TUESDAY, JUNE 27
• Introductions
• Distribute and review syllabus.
• Discuss course requirements and goals.
• Discuss the types of performances, films, exhibits that students should see. Those of you who will be performing standup should go see some.
• Begin looking at these questions:
  • What is so funny about NYC?
  • Is NYC, in fact, funny? Why? How is this expressed?
  • Is there a NYC aesthetic, mythology, culture?
  • If so, what is it? How do we recognize it?
  • How do different parts of NYC fall into this discussion? Why, for example, is Brooklyn funnier than Queens? Or is it?
  • What role does ethnicity play? Race? Class? Gender?
  • What effect have the events of September 11, 2001 had on the city? On performances?
  • And so on: We will discuss more thoroughly in class.
• View 212 segment.
• View After Hours by Martin Scorcese.

2. WEDNESDAY, JUNE 27
• In-depth discussion of After Hours.

3. THURSDAY, JUNE 28
• View Borat segment.
• Discuss Mintz, Walker, Friend, Gopnik, and Schechner.
• Establish some essential points of humor theory: What is funny and why? Establish some NYC “reference points.” How do we identify something as New York? Discuss what is performance?
• First response paper due: Analyze a New York “performance.” Why was it New York? Was it funny? How? How was NYC performed?

WEEK THREE: Different New York Voices
READINGS (due Thursday, 5/24):

4. TUESDAY, MAY 22
   • View Some People by Danny Hoch.

5. WEDNESDAY, MAY 23
   • View Mambo Mouth by John Leguizamo.

6. THURSDAY, MAY 24
   • Discuss Hoch, Leguizamo, and readings.
   • Second response paper due.

WEEK THREE: More NYC in Performance

READINGS:
Camp, Jennifer: The Big Bang
Cody, Cornelia: Mongrel: The Life and Words of Dorothy Parker

MOVIE:
Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle

7. TUESDAY, MAY 29
   • View and discuss Fires in the Mirror.

8. WEDNESDAY, MAY 30
   • Master Class: Playwright Jennifer Camp
   • Volunteers needed for a reading of Jennifer Camp’s play.

9. THURSDAY, MAY 31
   • Presentations on the Algonquin Round Table folks.
   • Discuss Mongrel.
   • Third response paper due.

WEEK TWO: Personal Experience Narratives
READINGS (due Tuesday, 7/3):
Oring, Eliot: “Appropriate Incongruity,” [finish citation]
“Metropolitan Diary” from The New York Times
Sedaris, David: “Santaland Diaries” from Barrel Fever: Stories and Essays. New York:
Brown, Mari and Deanna Pacelli: There Goes the Neighborhood, 2003

4. TUESDAY, JULY 3
• Continue discussion of humor theory.
• Discuss Metropolitan Diary, Sedaris, and “Only in NY.”

NO CLASS ON WEDNESDAY, JULY 4
• Personal experience narratives workshop.
• Personal experience narratives due.
• Final presentation topics due.

5. THURSDAY, JULY 5
• Guest performer/speaker: Deanna Pacelli (ETW Grad): There Goes the Neighborhood.
• Performance space: TBA
• Hand out: Order of final presentations.

**WEEK FIVE: Standup Comedy and Those Funny New York Jewish Guys**

READINGS (due Wednesday, 6/13):
Oring, Eliot: “The People of the Joke: On the Conceptualization of a Jewish Humor,” The
Hoch, Danny: “Danny’s Trip to L.A.” from Jails, Hospitals and Hip-Hop & Some
People.
Mintz, Lawrence: “Ideology in the Television Situation Comedy,” What’s So Funny?:
Humor in American Culture. [hand out]
Mintz, Lawrence: “Stand-Up Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation,” What’s So
Funny?: Humor in American Culture. [hand out]

MOVIES (see by Wednesday, 6/13):
The Producers
Annie Hall
The Out-of-Towners

TELEVISION:
Watch at least one episode of Seinfeld before 6/13.

13. TUESDAY, JUNE 12
• View Lenny Bruce.
14. WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13
• Discuss Lenny Bruce, Jerry Seinfeld, movies and readings.

15. THURSDAY, JUNE 14
• Rehearsal for Stand Up New York at the club (78th and Broadway) with Wayne Rada, General Manager.
• Fourth response paper due.

WEEK SIX: Wrapping It Up

READINGS (due Tuesday, 6/19)
Gopnik, Adam: “The People on the Bus,” The New Yorker, 5/3/03

MONDAY, JUNE 18
• 7:00 PM performance at Stand Up New York: 78th and Broadway
• Arrive early, especially comics.
• Attendance required.

16. TUESDAY, JUNE 19
• Presentations

17. WEDNESDAY, JUNE 20
• Presentations

18. THURSDAY, JUNE 21
• Presentations
• Final Wrap Up

FINAL TOPIC SUGGESTIONS

Brooklynese
Alternate-side of the street parking
Sex and the City
Fran Lebowitz
Andy Warhol
Punk music
The New York City Sports Fan
The Apollo Theatre
Cotter

The New Yorker
George Carlin
Vaudeville
The Honeymooners
B. Hackett
Studio 54
Music Under New York
Jules Pfeiffer

Spike Lee
Letterman
Coney Island
J. Gleason
Doormen
Times Square
Welcome Back

Brown, Mari and Deanna Pacelli: There Goes the Neighborhood, 2003
• Guest performer/speaker: Deanna Pacelli (ETW Grad): There Goes the Neighborhood.
• Performance space: TBA