What’s So Funny?

Fall 2016
Copenhagen
3 Credits

Major Disciplines: Communication, Rhetoric, Anthropology

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Tuesdays and Fridays, 13.15-14.35, Vesteregade 10-D11

Description of Course:

Standup comedy, ‘fake news’ broadcasts, and satirical novels, movies and magazines encourage us to laugh at political leaders, cultural icons, religious authorities, our enemies, and ourselves. Humorous discourse allows us to discuss controversial and serious topics such as politics, religion, race, class, and gender through laughter. On the one hand, satire and parody has the ability to knock authorities off their pedestals and encourage a less obedient, and more rebellious, attitude towards those in power, which is why authorities have censored and banned satires for centuries. On the other hand, laughter can also shame, offend, or marginalize, which may stir controversy and violence, as we witnessed with the Muhammad cartoon crisis in Denmark and the attack on the satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo, in Paris.
Final Syllabus

With a special focus on similarities and differences between satire produced in Europe and the U.S., we investigate how satirical expressions can reflect important cultural norms and values, instigate change, challenge authorities, marginalize, offend, and empower.

We will analyze significant humorous and satirical works produced in Europe and compare them to the American productions. In order to fully understand the choices and techniques of a humorous and satirical discourse, we will also produce humor and satire ourselves in the form of written parodies, fake news, spoof advertisements, etc.

The course thus combines a historical and theoretical examination of humorous and satirical discourse with a practical understanding of how to elicit laughter or indignation in an audience.

The course requires no previous knowledge or interest in humor or satire just as you do not have to be the least bit funny to be in this class. However, you might be in danger of enjoying yourself during class.

Learning Objectives:
- You will gain a strong knowledge of the history and cultural impact of humorous and satirical discourse in Europe
- You will gain a deeper understanding of how humor reflects and shapes cultural norms, values and attitudes
- Through hands on humor production workshops, analysis of existing humor, and conversations with satirists and comedians, you will get a deep understanding of the complexities of humor as a means of communication.

Faculty:

**Dennis Meyhoff Brink** received an MA in comparative literature in 2005 from University of Copenhagen and he is currently finishing a PhD on the history of religious satire in Europe. He has been teaching comparative literature and cultural studies at University of Copenhagen since 2006. Apart from publishing academic articles on a variety of subjects, not least on satire, he is also a critic at the Danish newspaper *Weekendavisen* and a columnist at the Danish satire magazine *Spot*. In 2014, he curated an exhibition on satirical drawings at the *Storm P Museum* in Copenhagen. With DIS since 2016.

**Helle Rytkønen.** Ph.D. (Modern Thought and Literature, Stanford University, 2002). M.S. and B.S. (Political Science, University of Copenhagen). Helle taught classes on fake news, humor, race, class and gender at Stanford University for six years and previously taught classes on cultural anthropology and philosophy at both Stanford and University of San Francisco. She also taught classes on gender and cross cultural communication at DIS. She has published a book chapter on the Danish reactions to the Mohammed cartoons and is an avid consumer of humorous TV shows. With DIS since 2012.

Readings (available on Canvas):
Final Syllabus


Field Studies (subject to change):
- Visit to Den Korte Radioavis, Satirical News Program on Radio 24/7 and the Storm P Museum, Copenhagen.
- Workshop with satirical writers and cartoonists from Rokokoposten and Spot, Copenhagen.

Guest Lecturers:
Sanne Søndergård, Danish standup comedian.
Mikkel Andersson, Danish writer of fake news at Rokokoposten.
Erik Petri, Danish cartoonist at the satirical magazine Spot.
Ellie Jokar, actor in the Danish satirical television series Det slører stadig.

Course Spirit:
Our ambition is to have a classroom culture where it is safe – and fun - to explore ideas and trains of thoughts together and individually, even when they are not fully conceptualized or thought through. This requires a great amount of trust in each other and a willingness and curiosity to consider each other’s arguments.

Our class is intended to be student driven. While we as faculty are responsible for the overall structure of the class, all of us will contribute to the production of knowledge. Stimulating and mind-blowing discussions are almost bound to happen when we all bring our talents, experiences and thoughts to the table.

Evaluation:
The course consist of an introduction to the history of satire, more in-depth-analysis of satires on specific student-elected themes, and student-based productions of own satires. In class, we will analyze examples of satire, discuss theoretical texts, and work on our own satirical productions.

- In class oral presentation analyzing a piece of satire or discussion a theoretical text (as part of a group of 2-3 students): 25%
- Mid-term: A 3-page draft version of your final paper or production: 25%
- Final production: You can choose to either write a 2400 word scholarly informed paper on a topic of your own choice related to the class or produce a piece of satire and write a 600 word academic reflection. Topics have to be approved by Helle and Dennis: 50%

A word about grades: We realize that grades are important to you, but try not to let your anxiety about grades deter you from taking intellectual risks and learning just for the joy of learning. Also, we do not grade to punish or reward you just as our grade is not an indication of our evaluation of you as a person. We grade you to give you our honest assessment of your academic performance at this point in time.

Attendance:
You are expected to attend all classes, guest lectures, workshops and field studies. If you must miss a class for religious holidays, medical reasons, or other valid reasons, you must let us know as far in advance as possible of the absence and obtain information about the work you must do to keep up in class. If you miss a class for any other reason (sudden illness, family emergency, etc.), you should get in touch with us as soon as possible and arrange to make up the work missed.

It is crucial for your learning that you stay on task and hand in assignments on or before the due date. All work – including in-class projects – have to be completed in order to pass the class. Late papers or projects will be marked down with 1/3 of a grade for each day it is late.
Weekly Schedule

The schedule is likely to change to reflect the needs of the class:

Friday, August 26  Welcome and Introductions
Readings:
Matthew Hodgart, Origins and principles
Abrams & Harpham, Satire

Tuesday, August 30  Carnival and the Medieval Culture of Laughter
Readings: Mikhail Bakhtin, "Introduction" to Rabelais and His World
Francois Rabelais, Gargantua and Pantagruel (excerpts)

Friday, September 2  Critique of Authorities in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance
Readings:
Laura Kendrick, “Medieval Satire"
Anonymous, Treatise of Garcia of Toledo
Desiderius Erasmus, Julius Excluded from Heaven (excerpt)

Tuesday, September 6  Demons and Possessions in Early Modern Europe
Readings:
Robert Scribner, "Demons, Defecation, and Monsters"
Cyrano de Bergerac, “Voyage to the Sun” (excerpt)

Friday, September 9  Forbidden Best-Sellers in the Age of Enlightenment
Readings:
Marquis d’Argens, Therese the philosopher (excerpt)
Robert Darnton, “Philosophical pornography”

Tuesday, September 13 - Friday, September 16
No class, core Course Week

Tuesday, September 20  Danish Humor (HR)
Preparation:
Watch Klovn (film) by Casper Christensen and Frank Hvam
Michael Billig, “Embarrassment, Humour and the Social Order”

Wednesday, September 21  Field Study: 13-17 (HR)
Visit Den Korte Radioavis and the Storm P Museum

Friday, September 23  Attacking and Defending Satire
Readings:
Roger D. Lund, “Infectious Wit"
Ashley Marshall, “The Business of Satire”
Jonathan Swift, A Tale of a Tub (excerpt)

Tuesday, September 27  Satirical Magazines and Censorship in the 19th century
Readings:
Robert Justin Goldstein, "The Fear of Caricature and the Censorship Mechanics"
Mary Lee Townsend, "Slouching toward the Revolution"

Friday, September 30   The Impact of Satire
Readings:
Robert C. Elliott, "The satirist and society"
Dustin Griffin, "Satire and the world of politics"
Moliere, Tartuffe (excerpts)

Tuesday, October 4   Satire as Critique and Cynicism
Readings:
Peter Sloterdijk, “Enlightenment as Dialogue” + “In search of lost cheekiness” (excerpt)
Examples of Caricatures from “Der Stürmer”
Film: Charlie Chaplin, The Great Dictator (excerpts)

Friday, October 7   The Rushdie Affair (DMB)
Readings:
Salman Rushdie, The satanic verses (excerpt)
Salman Rushdie, "In good faith"
Film: Monty Python, Life of Brian (excerpts)

Tuesday, October 11 - October 14   No Class, Travel Break 1

Tuesday, October 18   Humor and Minorities in Denmark (DMB)
Guest lecture: Ellie Jokar from the Danish television satire Det slører stadig (It’s still blurry)

Friday, October 21   The Danish Cartoon Controversy
Readings:
Jytte Klausen, “The Editors and the Cartoonists”
Frederik Stjernfelt, "Muhammad and Fogh Caricatures: A Comparative Analysis"

Tuesday, October 25   Charlie Hebdo: Racism or critique of authority?
Preparation:
Olivier Cyran, “Charlie Hebdo, not racist? If you say so …”
Zineb El Rhazoui, "If Charlie Hebdo is racist, then so am I”
Jane Weston Vauclair, “Local Laughter, Global Polemics”

Wednesday, October 26   Field Study – 8:30-12:30
Intense Satire Production Workshop.
Guests: Cartoonist Erik Petri and Fake-News-writer Mikkel Andersson

Friday, October 28   Follow-up on workshop
No Readings

Tuesday, November - Friday, November 4
No class

Tuesday, November 8   Theme decided on by class
Final Syllabus

Preparation TBA

Friday, November 11  Theme decided on by class
Preparation TBA

Tuesday, November 15  Theme decided on by class
Preparation TBA

Friday, November 18  Feminist Humor
Class guest: Sanne Søndergård, Stand up comedian

Tuesday, November 22  Workshop on final product
Preparation: Bring your draft

Friday, November 25  NO CLASS

Tuesday, November 29  Theme decided on by class
Preparation TBA

Friday, December 2  Theme decided on by class
Preparation TBA

Tuesday, December 6  Wrap up
Deadline for final product