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FALL 2016

Barnet Kellman

The Use of the Comic Perspective in Storytelling

Hello i am Barnet Kellman and i teach directing in the Production Division. Before coming to SCA i worked in New York, Los Angeles and elsewhere in the country

Career

- ACTOR
- THEATRE DIRECTOR
- MULTI-CAM TV DIRECTOR
- FEATURE FILM DIRECTOR
- SCREENWRITER
- COMEDY PILOT DIRECTOR
- TV COMEDY PRODUCER
- SERIES CREATOR/ SHOW RUNNER
- EPISODIC DRAMA
- MOVIES FOR TV

I've enjoyed a rich and varied career... MOST OF it spent DIRECTING COMEDY....

COMEDY

It was the form i was most successful at...



— sometimes i was tempted to believe i'd had The Secret

The Secret of Comedy

which as you all know is

TIMING!

But what does that mean? -- what does it tell us? -- where does timing come from? And Is that the secret? Is there a Secret? if there's a secret Can it be acquired? I knew one thing: When i am directing comedy...

“When I am directing comedy, being funny is the last thing on my mind.”



Which begs the question — what is on my mind when directing comedy



TRYING TO FIND THE SECRET OF COMEDY

A TREASURE HUNT



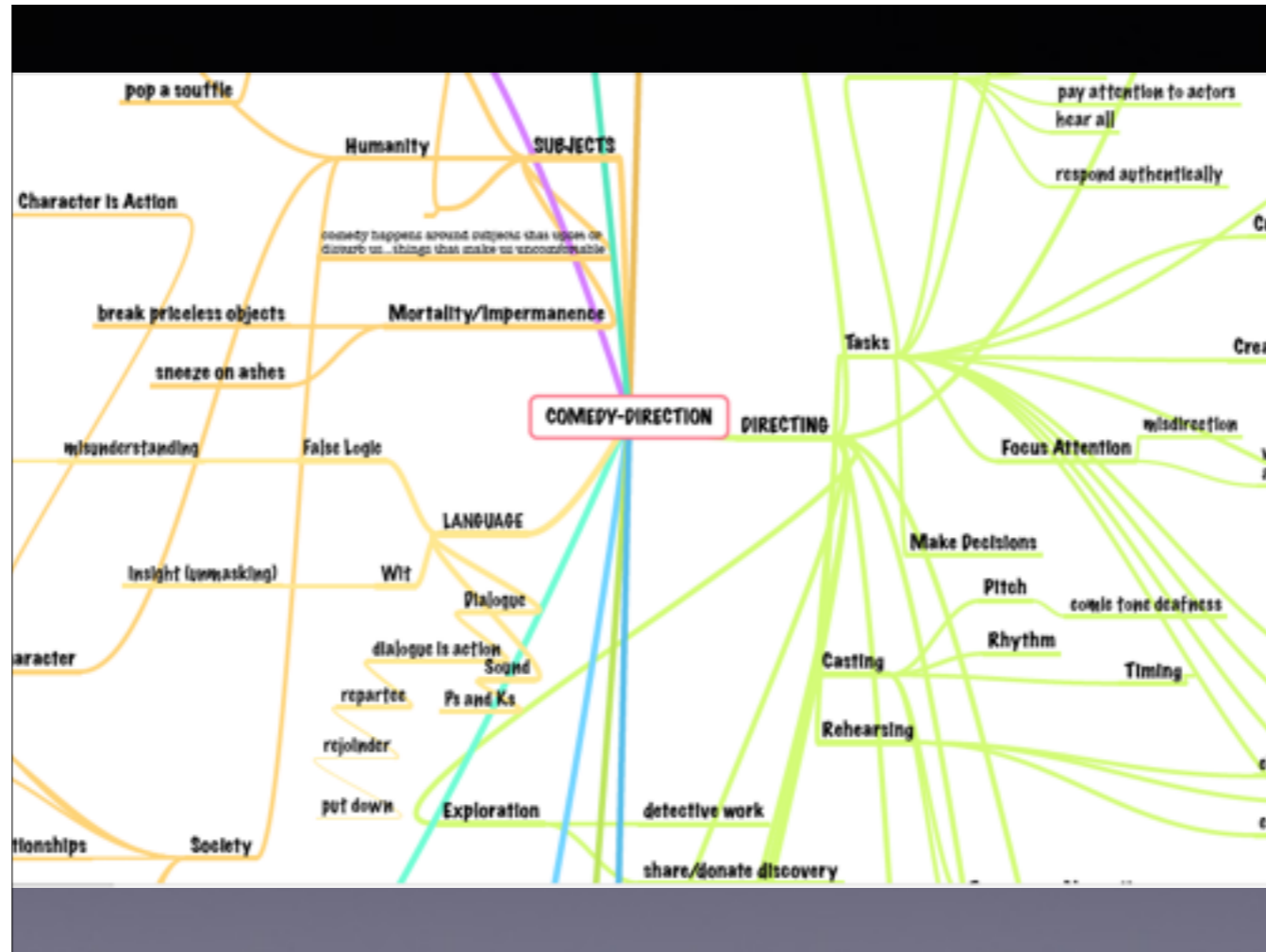
and occasionally I'd PONDER these THOUGHTS ...until one day The Writers Guild went on strike



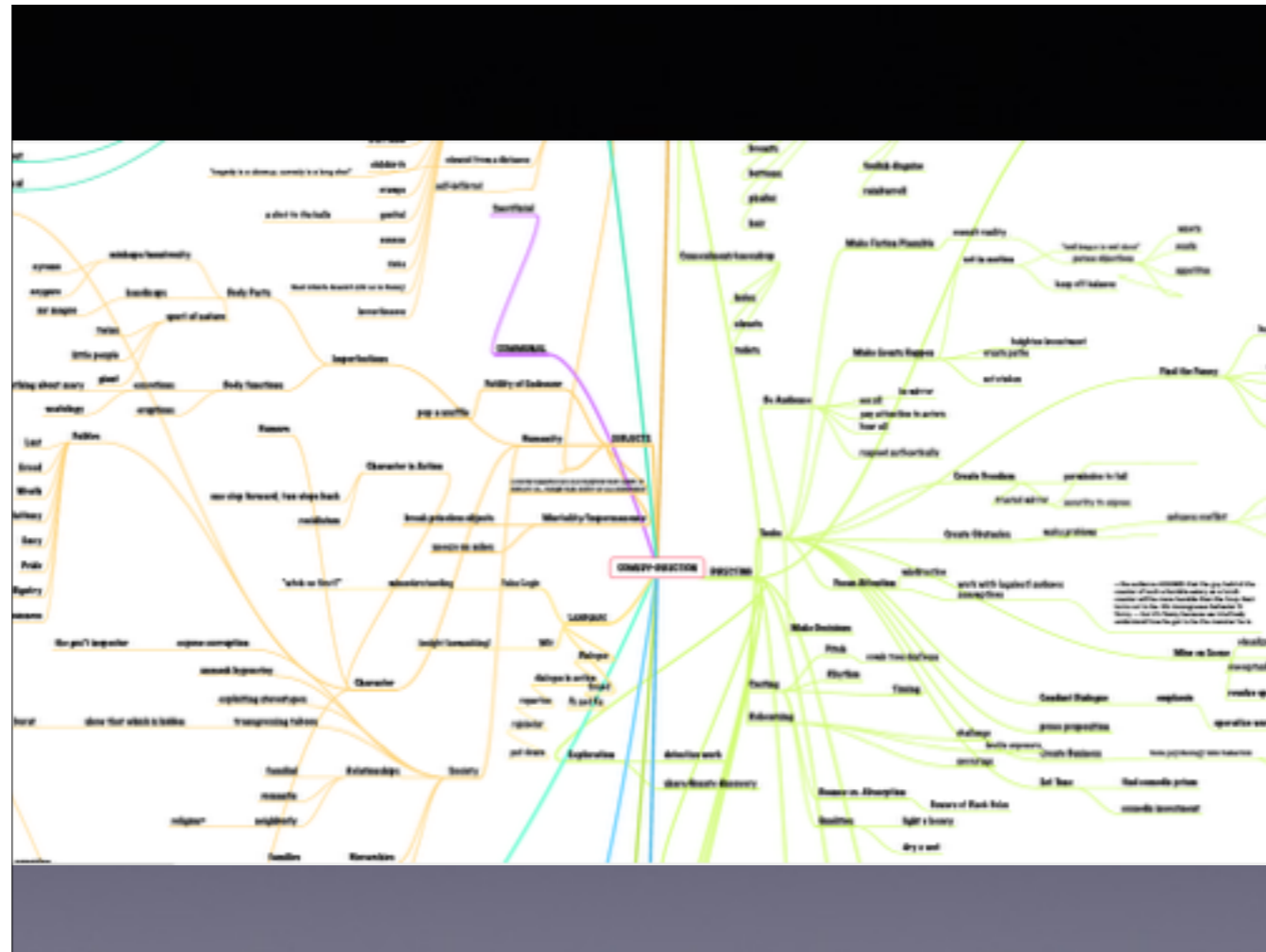
in 2008 — shut down the show i was directing and producing and gave me some time to think about my favorite topics comedy and directing



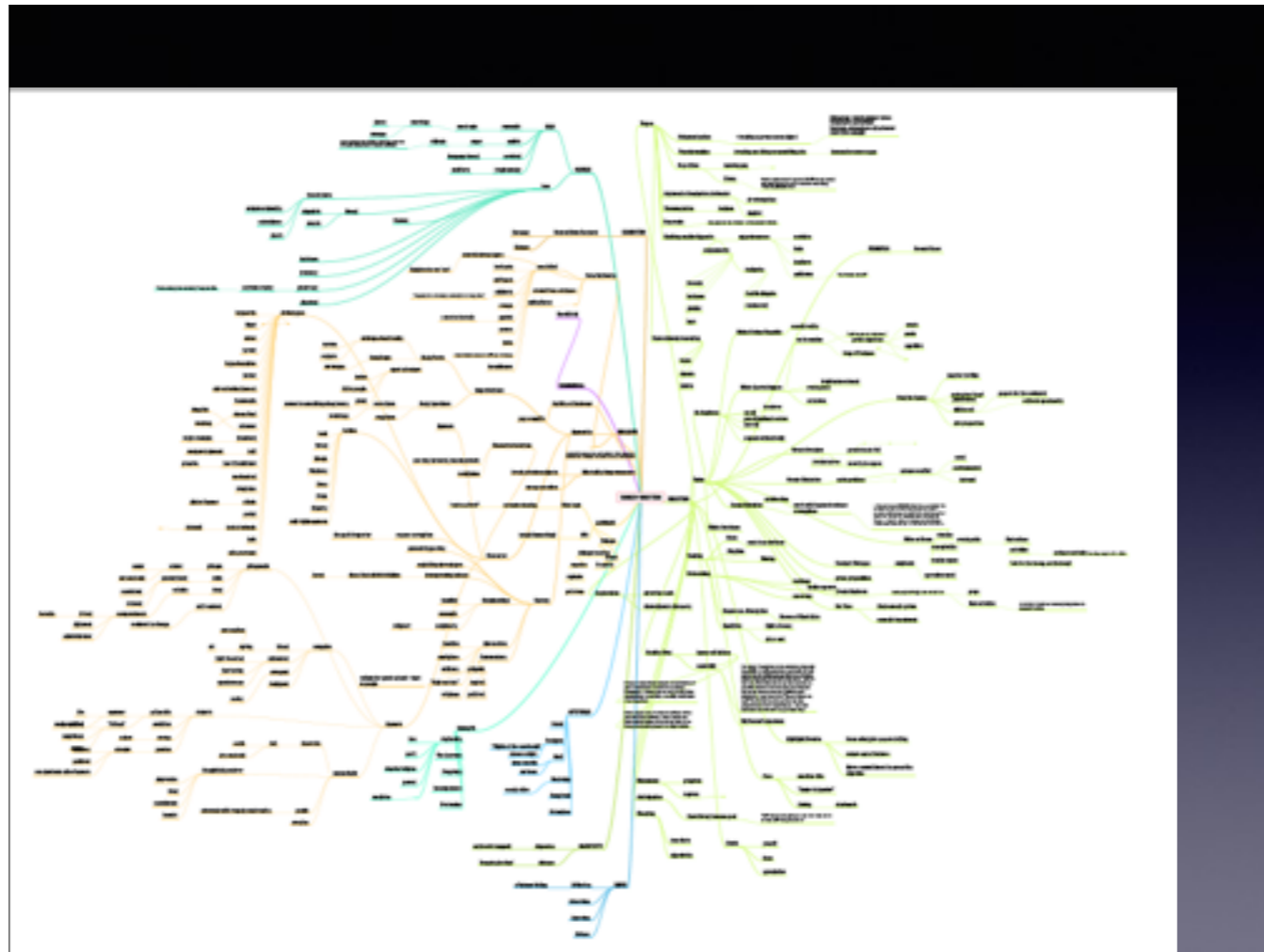
I started by asking If -- when i'm doing comedy, being FUNNY is the LAST THING ON MY MIND -- What, then, is on my mind?
To Figure that out I decided to make a map:



And it Grew



And Grew



And Grew until, Basically – it grew out of control!

But making the map --and seeing what was on it -- made clear to me that the concerns of Comedy were identical to those of drama.... – contrary to conventional wisdom – The Subjects were the same

Between Tragedy and Comedy

There is no difference
in the human concerns being addressed,
only in the matter of the **RESPONSE**

the response the storyteller was hoping to elicit

The Response:

LAUGHTER



THE LAUGH

AN INVOLUNTARY
AND UNDIGNIFIED -
ERUPTION MADE IN PUBLIC

sometimes accompanied by the release of bodily fluids

SORT OF LIKE A SNEEZE:

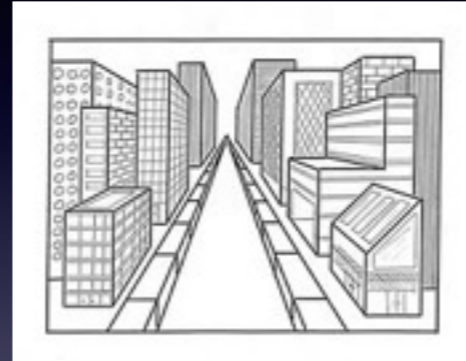
here's a True story: Two British directors – one directing Macbeth and the other a French Farce met in the bar of the National Theatre where both were rehearsing. The director of Macbeth said to the director of the Farce “You and i have opposite problems...you're trying to get the laughs in and I'm trying to keep them out.”

Drama = Comedy - Laughs

Macbeth, performed “wrong” becomes laughable --- MACBETH performed in a different key, can be played as a comedy! That is because Comedy proceeds from drama.

Drama + Laughs = Comedy

It's drama + laughs.
The truth + pain of the drama must be there --
where the laugh comes from a change in perspective.



PERSPECTIVE

THE PERSPECTIVE IS DIFFERENT -- THE SUBJECT -- in fact the very material - can be the same... Tragedy and Comedy are not different subjects

Tragedy and Comedy
are Perspectives
they are Lenses

Different Lenses on the same Subject



Human Life



Mel Brooks famously said

Mel Brooks
Said:

“TRAGEDY is
WHEN I GET A
HANG
NAIL...”



...Comedy is:

..YOU STEP OF A CURB
AND GET HIT
BY A BUS!!!”



Tragedy happens to me -- Comedy is what happens to the other guy

Tragedy
views life
from the
POV of
THE INDIVIDUAL

Comedy
views life from
the POV of
SOCIETY

Tragedy is Subjective

Comedy is Objective

Comedy is Tragedy VIEWED FROM A DISTANCE

THAT'S THE COMIC PERSPECTIVE

Charlie Chaplin
said:

“LIFE IS TRAGEDY
WHEN VIEWED
CLOSE UP
...BUT COMEDY
IN A LONG SHOT”



That
DISTANCE
can be
TIME

EXPRESSED BY THE FORMULA

Tragedy + Time =
Comedy

FOR EXAMPLE



The implication of the narrowness of the boundary between Tragedy and comedy is that it is a fine and risky line to walk. You need to know how to navigate the border!

Gilbert Gottfried said

Gilbert Gottfried:

“If Tragedy is around,
Comedy can't be far behind.
My motto is,
'Why wait?'"



He's the guy who flamed out on a 9/11 joke three weeks after the world trade center attack he came onstage and said he had to leave the Friars Roast early because he couldn't get a direct flight to LA - "The plane has to make a stop at The Empire State Building". He got shouted down with cries of "Too Soon!"

“Bad taste is simply
saying the truth
before
it should be said.”

Mel Brooks, again



Which i guess brings us back to TIMING



Well eventually the Writers Strike came to an end and I wasn't finished thinking about Comedy — it occurred to me that the best way to learn about Comedy and to figure out how I direct is — is to try to Teach it

Comedy

- a universal form of expression and a major dramatic genre that is intended to amuse.
- often associated with humorous behavior, wordplay, pleasurable feeling, release of tension, and laughter. Imbued with a playful spirit, comic entertainment frequently exposes incongruous, ridiculous, or grotesque aspects of human nature.
- It generally follows a fixed pattern of theatrical surprises that leads to a sense of exhilaration in the spectator. Of all dramatic genres, comedy is the most widely performed.



Which brought me to SCA where i have been fortunate enough to have the opportunity to create a course in Directing Comedy and co-found a program called

USC Comedy

at the School of Cinematic Arts



Stephan Lee for The New York Times
Meet the faculty: Barbet Keldman, left, Jack Epps Jr. and David Isaacs of the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts at Nate 'n Al Deli-cassoon in Beverly Hills, aka a "the commissary."

The New York Times

pictured here in the New York Times with fellow co-directors Professors Jack Epps and David Isaacs of the Writing Division
a program which offers courses and events... you may have heard of



OCT 28th-30th 2016

You just missed it - this year we pursued The Changing Face of comedy with panels on Women in Comedy, Diversity in comedy both on screen and off, Politics and Comedy, New Platforms and outlets for comedy along with Screenings and Events some guests included



PAUL FEIG



ISSA RAE



PRENTICE PENNY



RAVI PATEL

JUDD APATOW



as well as

Guests

- Cast of Insecure
- Maria Bamford
- Joe Lewis
- Jay Roach
- Norman Lear
- Diane English
- Frank Rich
- Cameron Esposito
- Nicole Byer
- Pete Holmes
- Alia Shawkat
- Max Mutchnick

PLUS OAKIE AWARDS FOR BEST SHORT COMEDIES given by comedian Pauly Shore at the Student Short

STUDENT SHORT FILM FESTIVAL

OAKIE \$\$\$\$ AWARDS



PAULY SHORE, Presenter

Sorry you missed it — but later this semester watch out for

The Hollywood Shuffle 30th Anniversary



With Robert Townsend and Keenan Ivory Wayans

And mixer with recent grads where young alumni who are emerging tell us about their paths and do some real FaceTime with interested students

Later on i'll tell you how you can get involved and help shape the next festival and USC Comedy events

So - comedy is fun - not surprising

Q: Comedy is fun,
but isn't a graduate university
a place to be dealing with serious things?



The idea that comedy is not serious is one of many common misconceptions
that keep people from grasping the comic opportunity;
No matter how trivial the dilemma it is deadly serious to the characters in a comedy -
like these guys in THE BIG LEBOWSKI



And If the dilemma is in itself serious - as it is in this scene from 50/50
in which Joseph Gordon Levitt has just told his best friend Seth Rogan that he has cancer
the comedy finds the trivial in the middle of life and death



But — you might wonder

Q: Isn't comedy just a genre
like action or horror?
We don't have special programs for them -
why comedy?

Comedy's Bigger than that: it's actually half of our Way of Processing the World
watch a clip from The Daily Show



TRUTH

“Comedy clarifies things.
It’s a laser like sense of truth.
If it’s true, if you touch truth,
it will be inevitably
so refreshing or astounding,
it will make people laugh.”

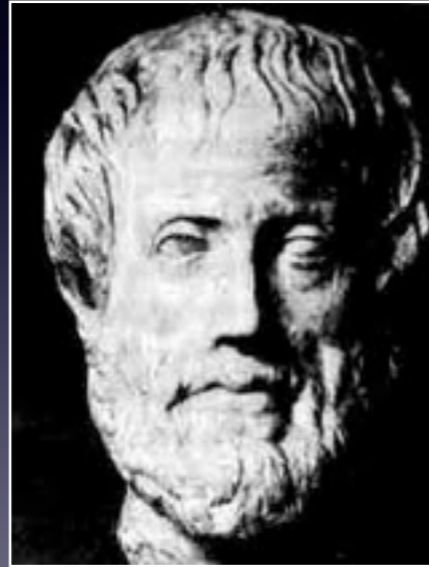
Laura Linney:

Comedy calls out the unspoken or unspeakable TRUTH – and it’s our recognition of these painful truths and the silence we use to try to encapsulate them...that recognition releases the pain and makes us laugh.

Q: Wait, cancer, truth, pain?
What are we talking about?
Isn't comedy "I Love Lucy" and "Austin Powers"...

Yes and All in the Family and The Graduate -- its all of that and more. Aristotle

Aristotle



“Humor is
the only
test of
gravity,
and gravity
of humor...”

...for
a subject
which will not bear
raillery
is suspicious,...

...and a jest
which will not bear
serious examination
is false wit.”

Aristotle is saying is that there is no subject that is too weighty to be explored through comedy - for example

Gravity Test

- Cancer
- Nuclear Annihilation
- Suicidal Depression
- Incest
- Murder
- 50/50
- Dr Strangelove
- Little Miss Sunshine
- Murmur of the Heart
- Crimes and Misdemeanors

and that no matter how lighthearted a comedy appears to be it has some serious concerns lurking beneath the surface

Humor Test

- Tootsie
- Animal House
- Life of Brian
- Young Frankenstein
- Sexism
- Elitism
- Cultism
- “Womb Envy”

This conversation about comedy is useful and necessary because, although comedy is a familiar fixture of all our lives, Misconceptions about comedy abound Here are some examples:

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT COMEDY

- COMEDY IS “RANDOM”
- LOGIC IS OPTIONAL
- REALITY GETS IN THE WAY

- COMEDY MUST BE “BIG”
- COMEDY IS IMPROVISED
- FUNNY ACTING IS BEING SILLY

- COMEDY IS ABOUT TRIVIAL THINGS
- COMEDY IS EASY

at SCA Our study of comedy takes on these Misconceptions.

As for this last one -- comedy is easy --- let's listen to Jerry Seinfeld talk about his process



It's the detail - comedy is like needle point

as the story says Dying is easy Comedy is hard

**Dying is
easy.
Comedy is
hard.**

You may wonder exactly what i mean by comedy

Q: Yeah...aren't you talking about a pretty broad field...
how do you define comedy?

Comedy is many things but at root it is a performance or gesture or utterance whose goal is to elicit a laugh – an involuntary reaction made in public –

Usually involving the release of bodily fluids...



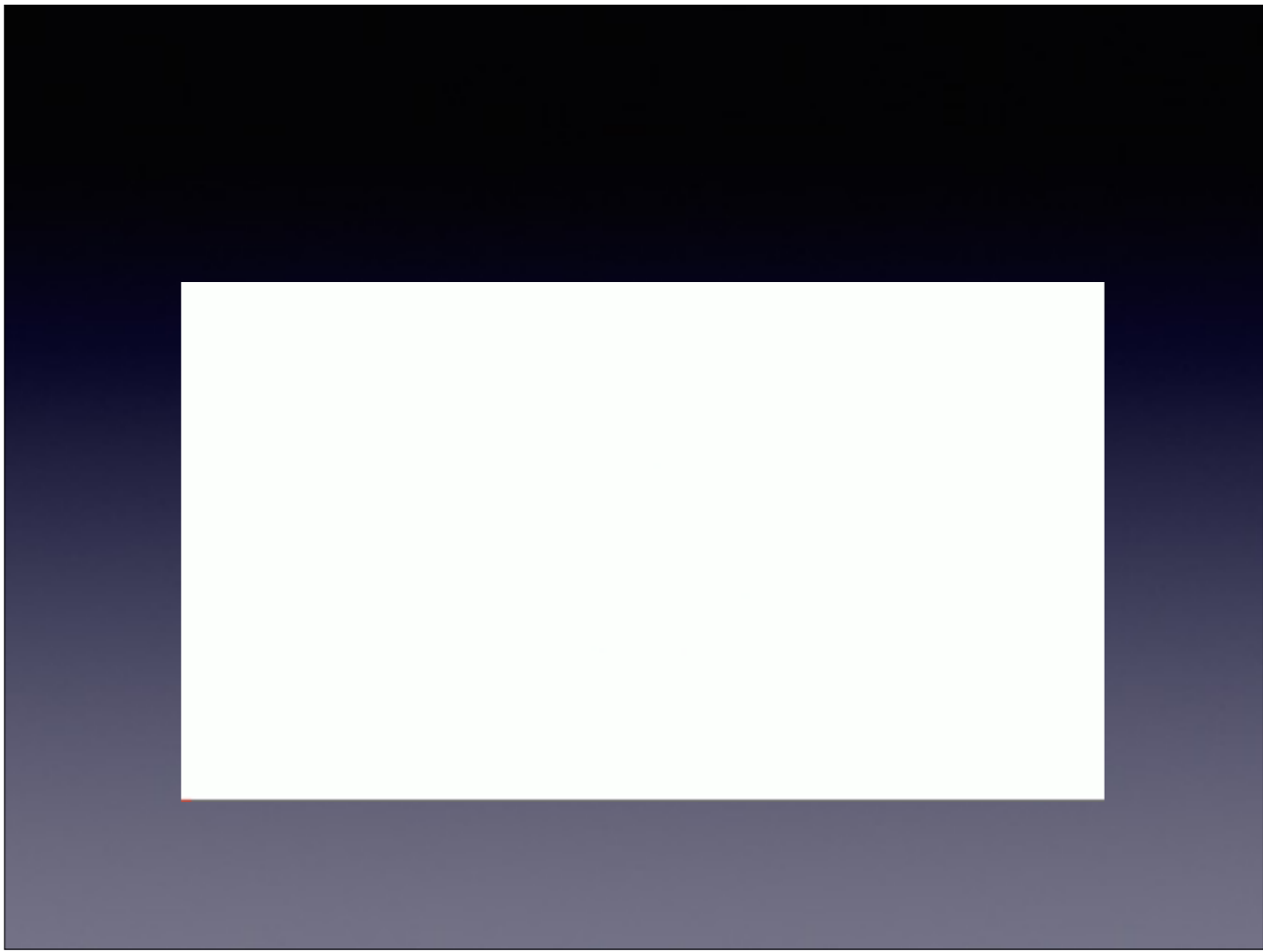
Laughter is Involuntary

PUBLIC RECOGNITION

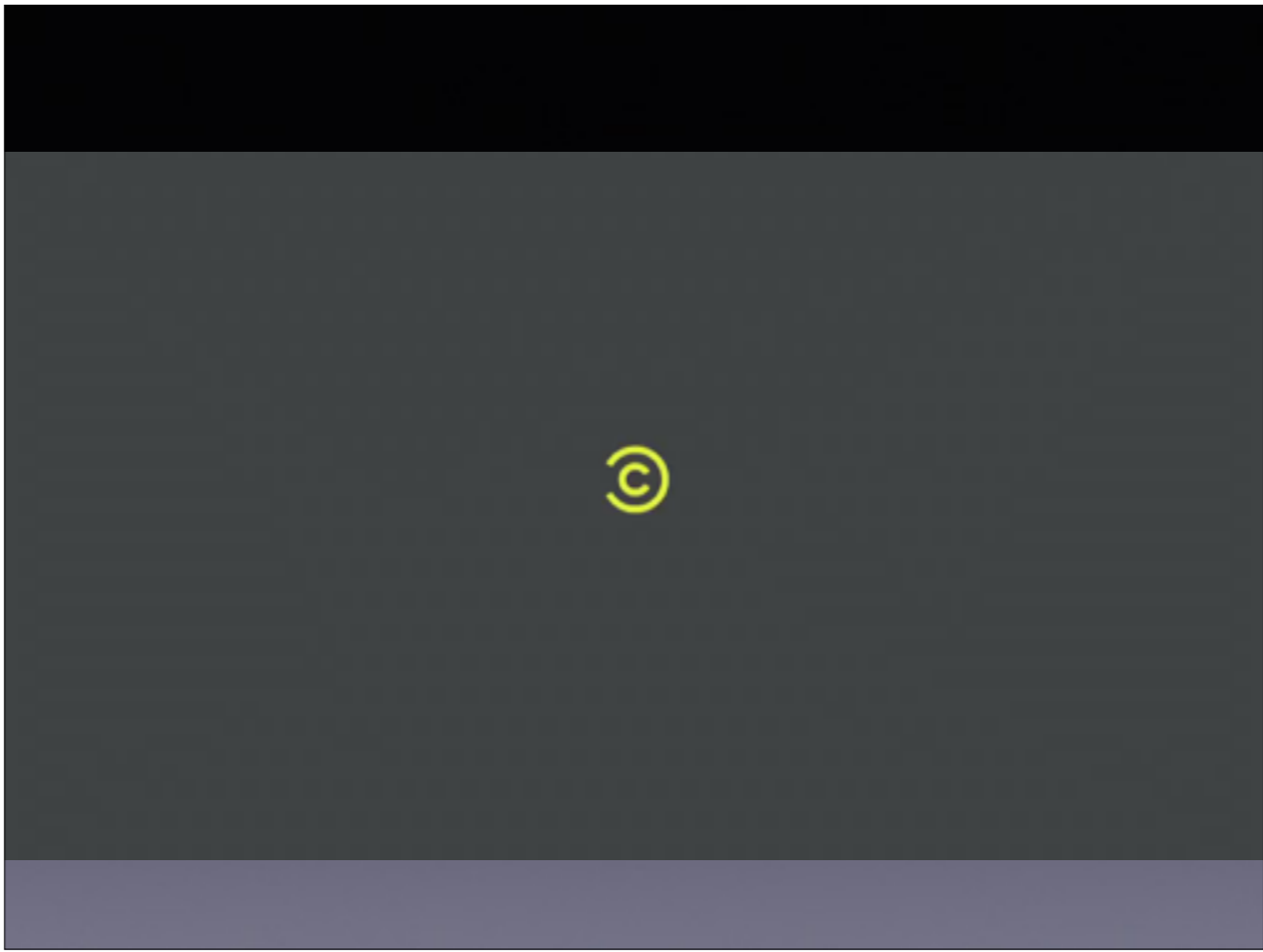
in pursuit of the recognition of shared social and human truth

Comedy is Social

It addresses the arbitrariness of our social customs and values -- Of the pain and pleasures of living bound to one another in society... as in this TED Talk by Pixar's Andrew Stanton



or this sketch from Key & Peele



OUCH! Comedy is Truth and Pain — And in these difficult times in our society we need Comedy more than ever

We Need Comedy
Now More Than Ever!

The Purpose of Comedy is to Test Moral and Social Boundaries

COMEDY IS - by its nature -
CONTROVERSIAL



the practice of Comedy comes with Risks but it's purpose is to heal by illuminating the boundaries of social life and challenging us to assess — through laughter — whether they are necessary or arbitrary...human or inhumane

A LAUGH

IS AN INVOLUNTARY
RECOGNITION OF
LIFE'S IMPERFECTION

A LAUGH

SIGNALS ACCEPTANCE OF WHAT IS
VERSUS
WHAT OUGHT TO BE

A LAUGH

IS WHAT COMES OUT
WHEN WE LOOK AT LIFE
OBJECTIVELY
FROM A DIVINE PERSPECTIVE

Uniquely Human

The ability to negotiate
and make peace with existence
through laughter
is a uniquely human gift.

The philosopher Simon Critchley said

“Humor lights up the stock of knowledge
we all share”

Simon Critchley

We laugh because we recognize and share the truth and pain of the situation. -- our humor binds us as defines us as a culture.
Someone said “A Nation is a group of people who laugh at the same stuff.”



Wait — how did that slide get in there? Sorry uh.....Mike Nichols Said:



“I don’t think comedy is an escape from
tragedy.
They are both life...”

..life is hopeless—but it isn't;
love is fleeting—but eternal;
our personal lives are
everything
—but we are unimportant.”

Mike Nichols

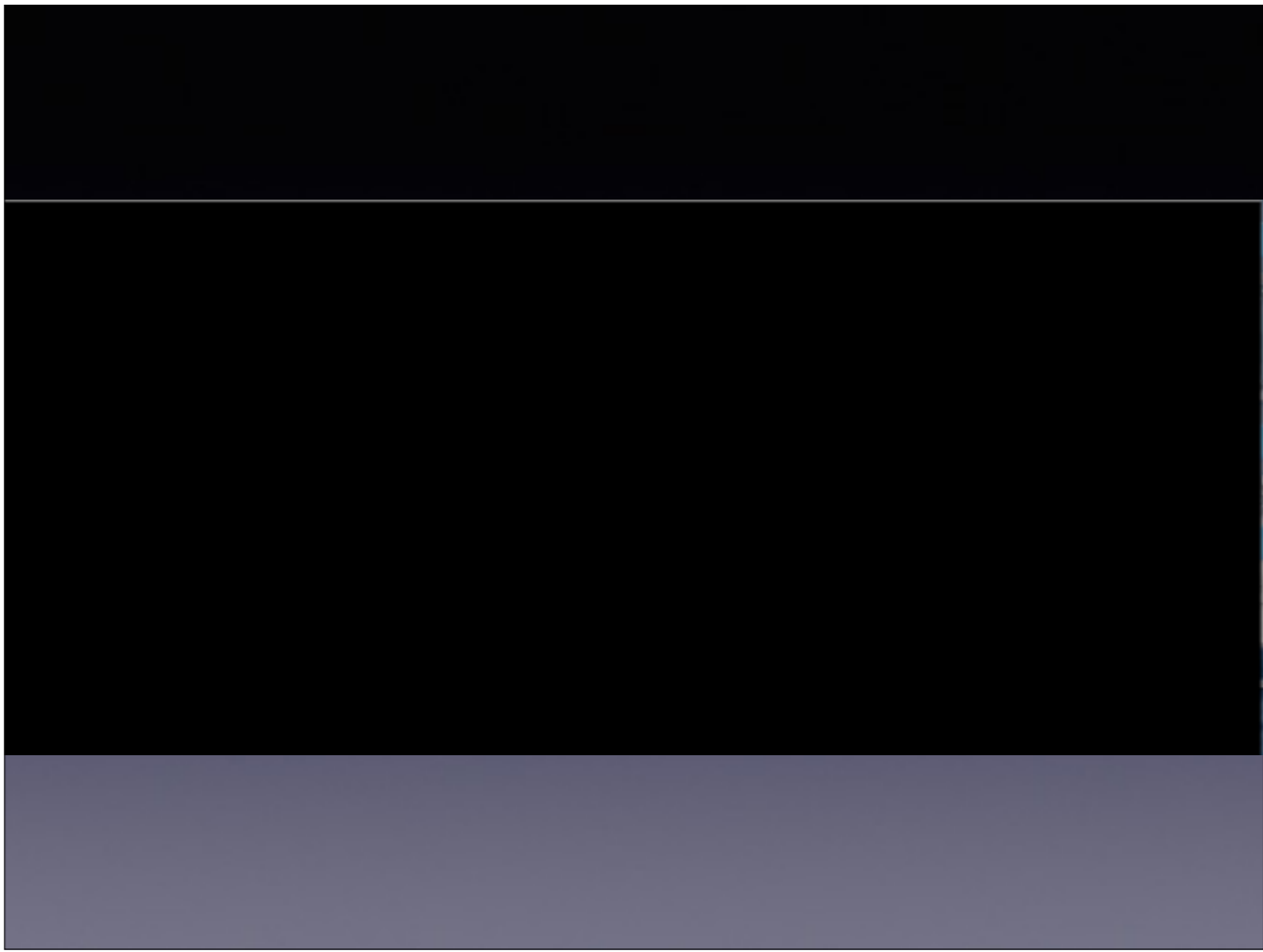
Comedy is Philosophy in Action

Which is why I am so grateful to be able to study and teach Comedy at SCA

Before i close let me tell you a little bit about our program details about which you can find at

[cinema.usc.edu/
comedy/](http://cinema.usc.edu/comedy/)

Here's a brief overview:



USC Comedy offers courses in the Production Division along with the possibility of completing a Comedy Production 4

Production

- CTPR 476
DIRECTING THE
COMEDIC SCENE
- CTPR 484 WITT-
THOMAS COMEDY
PILOT CLASS
- CTPR 532
INTERMEDIATE
DIRECTING -
COMEDY
- CTPR 464
DIRECTING
SKETCH COMEDY -
USC COMEDY LIVE
- CTPR 523 MULTI-
CAMERA TV
PRODUCTION

- CTPR 409 TROJAN VISION — USC COMEDY LIVE PRODUCTION
- CTPR 535 INTERMEDIATE EDITING

in the Writing Division

Writing

- CTWR 404 FOUNDATIONS OF COMEDY
- CTWR 434 COMEDY WRITING
- CTWR 438 LINKED NARRATIVE STORY TELLING FOR THE WEB
- CTWR 437 WRITING THE HALF-HOUR COMEDY PILOT
- CTWR 487 STAFF WRITING THE MULTI-CAMERA TV SERIES
- CTWR 407 CREATING THE COMEDIC CHARACTER

- CTWR 534 WRITING THE SPEC EPISODE
- CTWR 537 WRITING AN ORIGINAL 1/2 HOUR PILOT
- CTWR 477 STAFF WRITING THE SKETCH COMEDY
- CTWR 5517a & 517b HALF HOUR COMEDY THESIS

and in Cinema and Media Studies

Cinema & Media Studies

- SPRING 2016 -
WOODY ALLEN'S
NEW YORK
- CTCS 501 HISTORY
OF GLOBAL
CINEMA - The
Comedy Remix
- CTCS LOL - New
Approaches in Film
and Television
Comedy
- CTCS 403 -
COMEDY IN THE
CITY

Most of this info can be found on the SCA website

cinema.usc.edu/ comedy/

The screenshot shows the USC Cinematic Arts website. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for PROGRAMS, FACULTY, FACILITIES, ADMISSIONS, STUDENTS & PARENTS, ALUMNI, and RESEARCH. Below the navigation is a red header bar with the text "USC Comedy Courses" and a "VIEW RELATED PAGES" button with a dropdown arrow. The main content area is white and features two sections: "PRODUCTION DIVISION — CTPR" and "WRITING DIVISION — CTWR".

USC Cinematic Arts PROGRAMS FACULTY FACILITIES ADMISSIONS STUDENTS & PARENTS ALUMNI RESEARCH

Home > Special Programs > USC Comedy > Courses >

USC Comedy Courses

VIEW RELATED PAGES

PRODUCTION DIVISION — CTPR

- CTPR 464 Directing the Comedy Sketch Show with Professor Mary Lou Belli
- CTPR 476 Directing the Comedic Scene with Professor Barnet Kellman
- CTPR 532 Intermediate Directing/Comedy with Professor Barnet Kellman
- CTPR 371 Multi--Cam Comedy Directing with Professor Mary Lou Belli
- CTPR 523 Multi--Cam Comedy Directing with Professor Phil Ramuno
- CTPR 409 Trojan Vision Comedy@SCA Live with Professor Joel Parker

WRITING DIVISION — CTWR

- CTWR 420B Senior Thesis in Half-Hour TV Comedy with Nathan Mort; John Bowman
- CTWR 434 Writing the Half Hour Comedy Series with Larry Balmagia; FJ Pratt; Linda Teverbaugh
- CTWR 437 Writing the Original Situation Comedy Pilot with Russ Woody

here are a few highlights — Comedy Live...

USC COMEDY LIVE



4 course inter-divisional collaboration between Production, Writing, Dramatic Arts and Trojan vision...great way to meet and work with writers and actors

CTPR 484 The Sitcom Pilot Course — a Production 3



Another great collaboration with the Writing division
and classes that i teach – for example CTPR 532

Intermediate Directing/ Comedy ctptr 532



where, clearly, i can't keep myself from getting into the act

We also offer a wide variety of Workshops and events

EVENTS & WORKSHOPS



Like the recent mixer with SDA featuring actor-director Tony Shalhoub



DAVID BRIDEL - Physical Comedy Workshop



Frequent visits from and networking opportunities with VISITS FROM SCA COMEDY ALUMS



JOE LEWIS - Amazon - Transparent



PETER SEGAL - Director - Tommy Boy



NAHNATCHKA KHAN - Exec. Prod. - Fresh Off the Boat



TRACY OLIVER - creator -Awkward Black Girl

and other opportunities to work with and hear from working comedy professionals



PAUL WITT - creator of The Golden Girls
at 484 Table Reading



CHASE WINTON - The Groundlings -
Improv Workshop



STEVE RASCH
editor of Modern Family
Comedy Editing Workshop



THE JAMES L BROOKS - LARRY MOSS WORKSHOP

Workshops — observerships and challenges in collaboration with



SET VISITS & OBSERVERSHIPS

FUNNY OR **DIE**

WORKSHOP AND CONTEST



CHALLENGE

Visits from the writers rooms of



AND — Under the auspices of Visions and Voices we have held three Weekend-long Festivals;



past Festival guests have included



JAMES BURROWS

LISA KUDROW



CONAN O'BRIEN



BETTY WHITE



LARRY WILMORE



IVAN REITMAN



PAUL FEIG



PHIL ROSENTHAL



STEVE CARRELL

WE encourage you to help us mount -- VOLUME 4 — Coming very soon in the Fall of 2018

The Comedy Club

US Comedians
Club at the School of Cinematic Arts

We want and need your involvement – Find out how you can volunteer– get on our mailings and fb page
email Jack Hackett



Jack Hackett— jackhackett711@gmail.com

and on social media



@USCCOMEDY

So USC Comedy is a lot of things. We offer America's first comedy minor

Production IV and Thesis



UNDERGRADUATE MINOR in COMEDY

and EMPHASES for Writing and Production Grad students and a pathway to Production 4 completion concentrating in comedy –
to get more details contact Claudia Walters in advisement and me

CLAUDIA WALTERS cwalters@cinema.usc.edu

BARNET KELLMAN bkellman@cinema.usc.edu

As Paul Feig said:



“I wish they had a comedy concentration when I was here. All of the movies I made when I was here were comedies and they were met with a lot of derision and skepticism because the film school was a very serious place back in my day.

SCA ALUM

Paul Feig - director of *Bridesmaids*

creator of *Freaks & Geeks*

here at SCA We Give Comedy the Respect it deserves...the place it deserves

Yes! you say but....

Q: Is everybody funny?
Can comedy really be taught?
Can everyone do comedy?

Let's consider this example



The answer is – i don't know but i'm sure the comic perspective can enrich anyone's life and work.
and the absence of that perspective is sure to diminish ...

As the writer Henry Miller said...

“I should have been a Clown;
it would have afforded me
the widest range of expression.”

Henry Miller

So here at SCA we are building

Building an SCA Comedy Community
and
Network

USC Comedy

CONSIDER JOINING US

I hope you'll consider joining us.

thank you