

KEYS TO DIRECTING COMEDY

The number one key is to respect comedy.



RESPECT

If you get what it's really about...if you get it's underlying seriousness...if you feel the pain contained in comic irony and incongruity and paradox and the insolubility of the human condition...Then you are in on the REAL JOKE

CHECK THIS OUT - CLICK



WE ARE TRYING TO TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT THE WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN

TRUTH

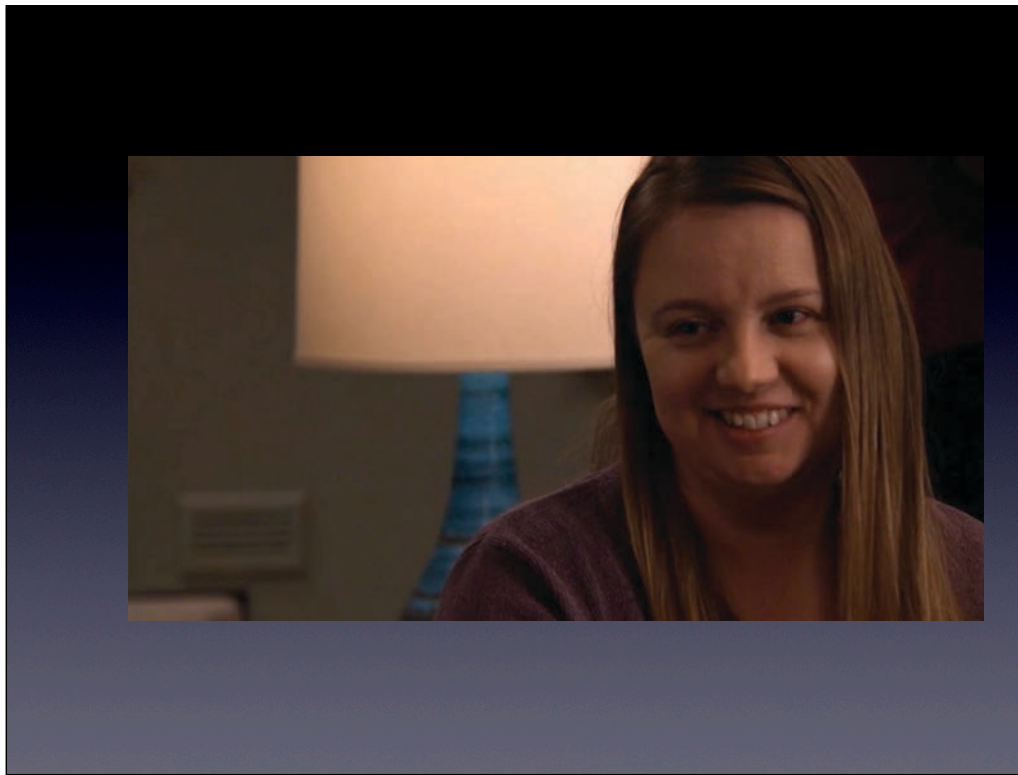
“Comedy clarifies things.
It’s a laser like sense of truth.
If it’s true, if you touch truth,
it will be inevitably
so refreshing or astounding,
it will make people laugh.”

Laura Linney:

REMEMBER THIS FROM VORHAUS? CLICK

... You often don't have to
tell a joke to get a laugh;
....you just have to
tell the truth..."

LIKE IN THIS SCENE FROM CYRUS - JOHN C REILLY -- IS DEPRESSED BECAUSE HIS
EX WIFE IS GETTING REMARRIED -- HE'S BEEN TAKEN TO A PARTY AND TOLD TO
GET BACK ON THE HORSE...PICK UP A LADY. AFTER A FEW FAILED ATTEMPTS AND
AFTER A FEW TOO MANY DRINKS... LET'S WATCH [CLICK](#)



WHY IS THE TELLING OF TRUTH SO ASTOUNDING? IS IT THE REVELATION OF A SURPRISING SECRET... QUITE THE CONTRARY - CLICK

SECRET OF COMEDY

It's Not A Secret

Comedy is about the revealing of secrets that are not secrets BK
JOHN'S SECRET TRUTH IS NOT A SECRET - BUT THE TELLING OF IT MAKES
US LAUGH. LIKE LAURA LINNEY'S "FAT & JOLLY vs SKINNY BITCH"
TRUTH -- It's the "Secret Truth" that's right before our eyes but
which we know we are not permitted to see or to say..
WE KNOW WE CAN'T SAY IT BECAUSE WE KNOW THE RULES OF SOCIETY



COMEDY IS SOCIAL

Comedy comes out of the fact that we are bound to one another, and the stresses of that bondage.

Also out of an reaction to the arbitrariness of Social Ritual. To create the comedy we must spotlight the “invisible” Social Ritual or Occasion that is controlling our behavior IN THE John C Reilly example – The Truth is that he is Prohibited from telling the Truth in this Social Situation...

...This truth and this pain
are the theme of the joke.”

BUT IN COMEDY IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO TELL A GENERAL TRUTH – WE HAVE TO TELL
THE SPECIFICS OF THE TRUTH

SPECIFICS

“Nothing kills humor like a
general and boring truth.”

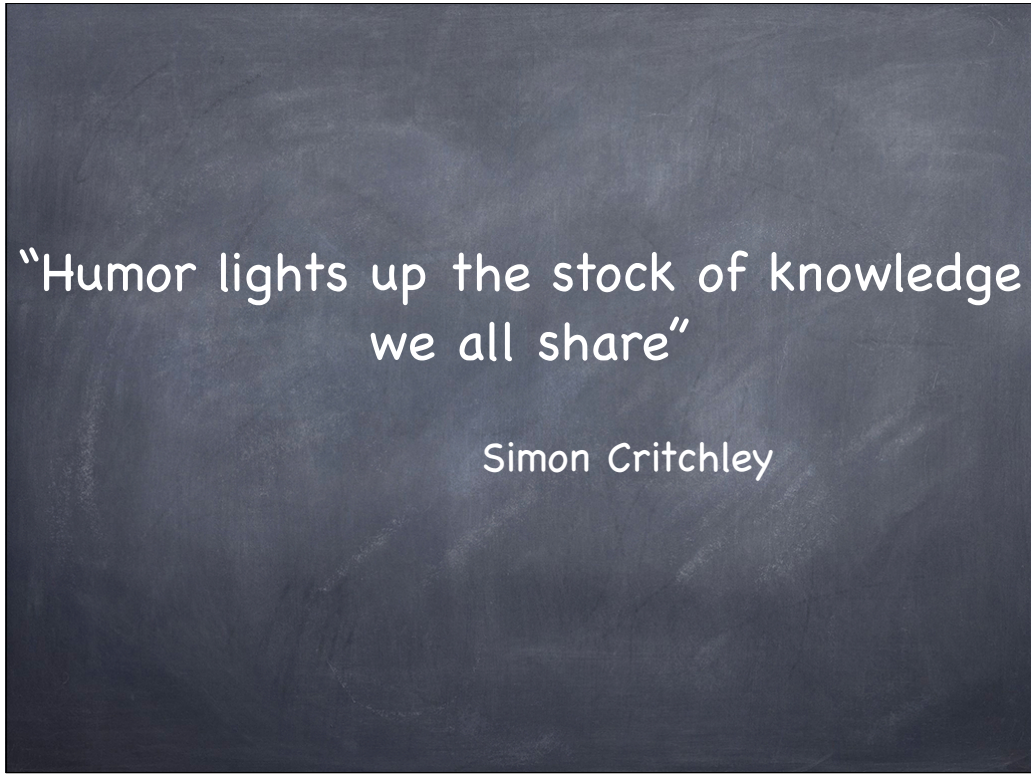
Scott Adams

IT'S THE SPECIFICS, THE TELLING OF PARTICULAR, OFTEN MINUTE AND PAINFUL TRUTHS THAT MAKES US LAUGH -- AND WE DO SO IN A VARIETY OF WAYS -- HERE ARE SOME TYPES OF LAUGHTER YOU WILL RECOGNIZE
CLICK

TYPES OF LAUGHTER

- The laughter of Being Uncomfortable
- The laughter of Surprise
- The laughter of Knowing
- The laughter of Anticipating
- The laughter of Wanting

THIS LAUGHTER IS A SIGN OF RECOGNITION – ITS THE WAY WE RECOGNIZE THAT WE HUMAN BEINGS SHARE EXPERIENCE –



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

Simon Critchley

EVEN IN THE MIDST OF PAINFUL TRUTH, LAUGHTER GIVES US THE PLEASURE OF NOT
BEING ALONE

-- EXPRESSES OUR PLEASURE IN NOT BEING ALONE

A LAUGH

IS AN INVOLUNTARY
RECOGNITION OF
LIFE'S IMPERFECTION

A LAUGH

SIGNALS ACCEPTANCE OF WHAT IS
VERSUS
WHAT OUGHT TO BE

IN THE SOCIAL REALM - IN SOCIETY - AND IN OUR NATURES
AS MEMBERS OF THE WORLD OF ANIMALS

ANIMALISM

The way our animal nature drags us into adventure

DISCUSS THE PROBLEM WITH OUR BEING ANIMALS
ANYTHING THAT EXPOSES THE GAP BETWEEN WHO WE THINK WE ARE
AND WHAT WE ARE (ANIMALS) IS FUNNY -- BOY THAT'S LIKE A
PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM ISN'T IT? --
YES - COMEDY DOESN'T SHY AWAY FROM PHILOSOPHY - in fact



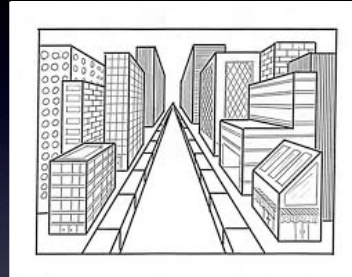
Comedy is
PHILOSOPHY
IN ACTION

Like a demonstrated premise -- an As if examination....viewed from a scientific perspective

Between Tragedy and Comedy

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

PERSPECTIVE



Different Lenses on the same Subject



Human Life

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 is Subjective

Comedy is Objective

Tragedy
views life
from the
POV of
THE INDIVIDUAL

Comedy
views life from
the POV of
SOCIETY

Charlie Chaplin
said:

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



Comedy is Tragedy

VIEWED FROM A DISTANCE

That
DISTANCE
can be
TIME

Tragedy + Time =
Comedy



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:

“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



Godfrey recovered by launching into a legendary rendition of “The Aristocrats” -- the most tasteless joke ever told

But i digress

to reiterate: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COMEDY & DRAMA IS A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE -- it's also a question of DETAIL

A LAUGH

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

- SO WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COMIC TRUTH-TELLING AND THE TRAGIC OR DRAMATIC OR MELODRAMATIC KIND?
WELL, FOR ONE THING, WHEN WE LOOK AT LIFE FROM THAT DIVINE PERSPECTIVE WE SEE IT IN A DIFFERENT KIND OF DETAIL... CLICK

DETAIL

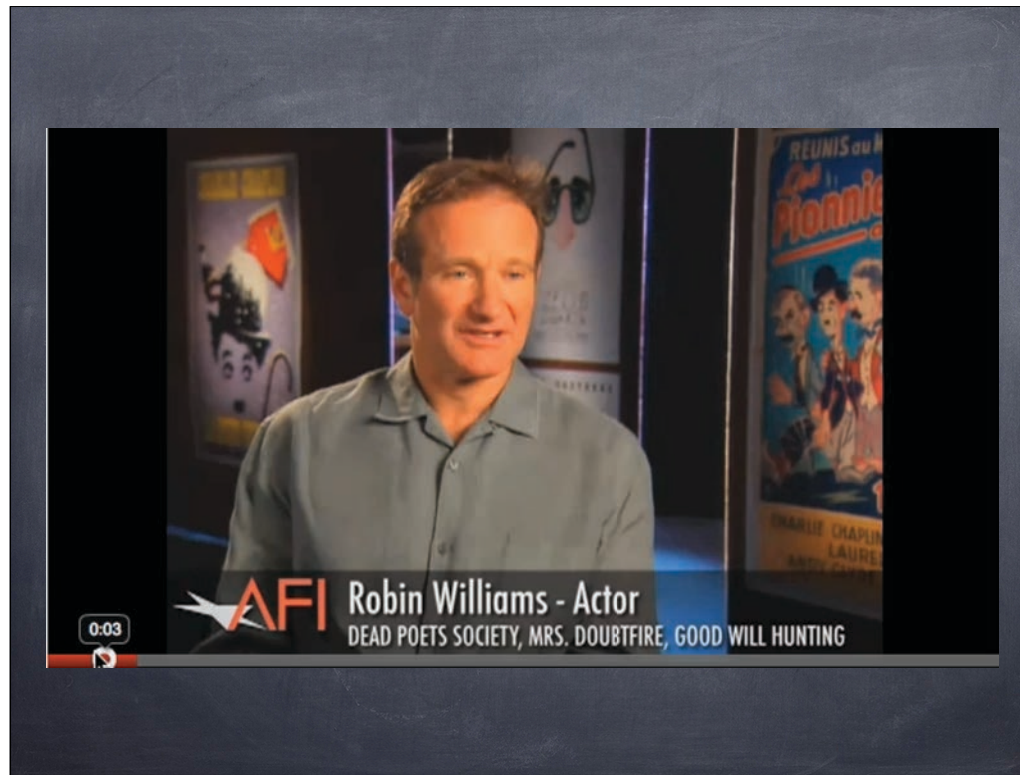
"The difference between
Comedy and Drama
is in a sense of Detail."

Elaine May

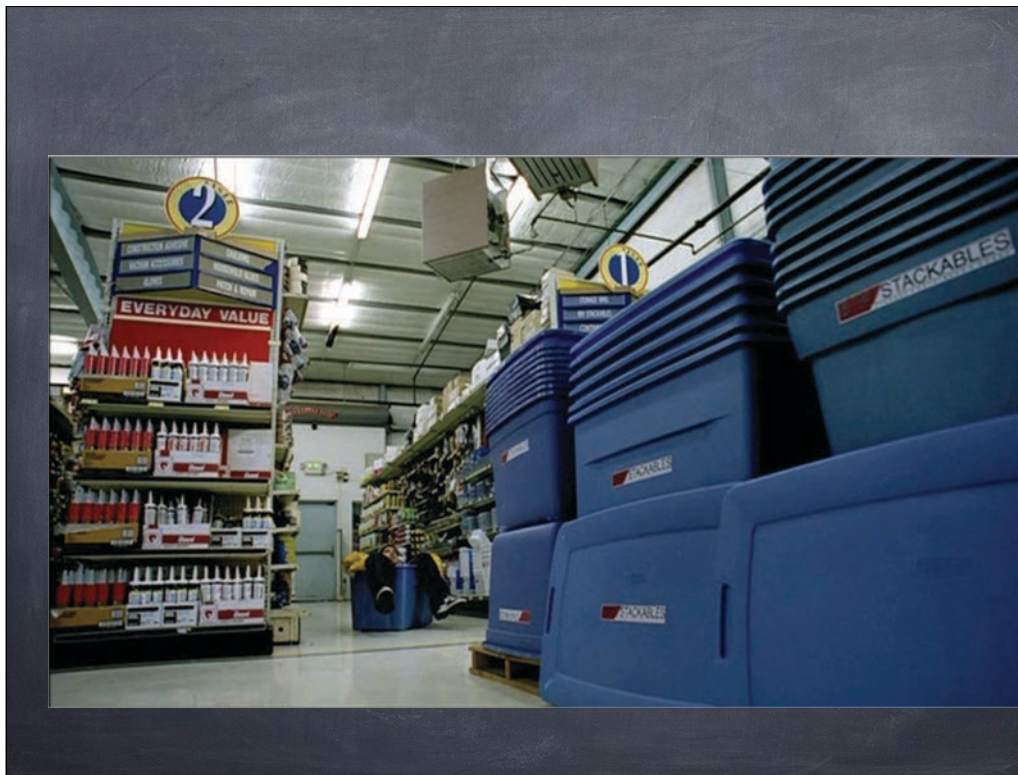
IT'S THE SPECIFICITY AGAIN...IT'S THE PARTICULAR, IT'S THE SIZE OR SCOPE OF THE EXAMINATION



ROBIN WILLIAMS QUOTED HER ON THAT – set up clip



SPEAKING OF HAMMERS – I CAN'T RESIST SHARING THIS FROM THE FIRST SEASON OF BREAKING BAD



THE IMPULSE MURDER REDUCED TO IT'S NAGGING INCONVENIENT DETAILS...AND IN THIS WAY MADE MANAGEABLE THROUGH LAUGHTER....

OK: LET'S REVIEW THE KEYS TO DIRECTING COMEDY SO FAR...CLICK TWICE

The Keys to Directing Comedy So Far:

- Respect Your Subject
- Look for the Truth - The SPECIFIC TRUTH
- Tell the Secrets that Aren't Secret
- Examine the Details

ALSO - CREATE THE WORLD AND FOLLOW THE LOGIC - CLICK

CREATE THE WORLD
&
FOLLOW ITS LOGIC

CLICK



COMEDY IS LOGIC
LOGIC RULES!

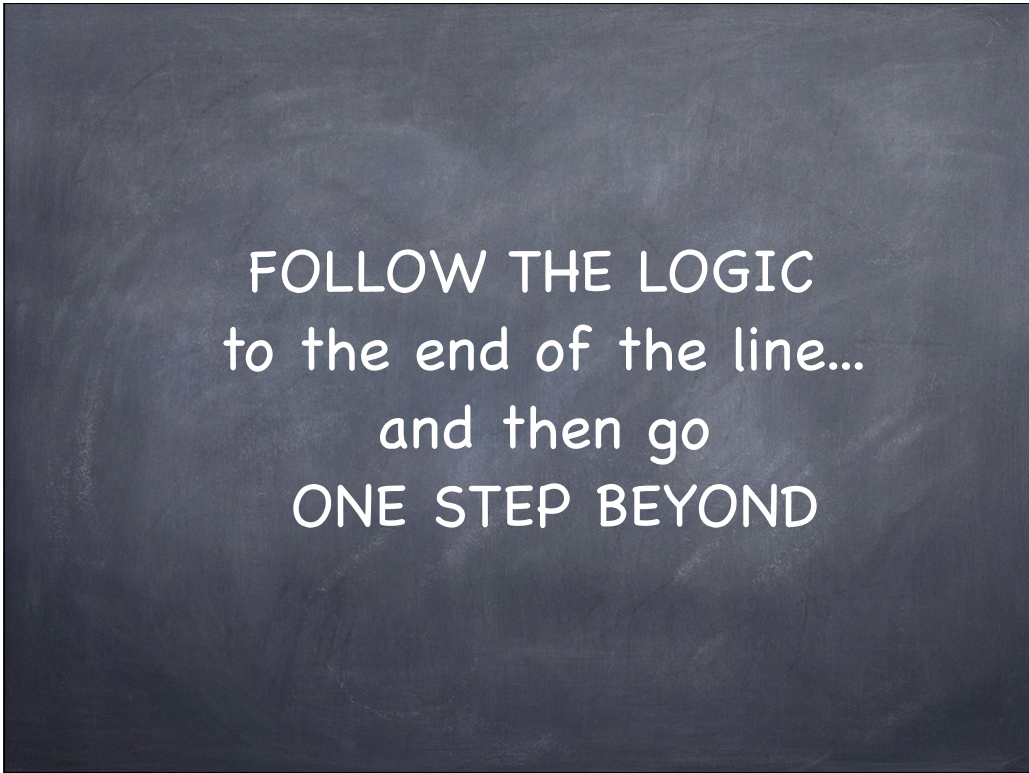
David Misch - who taught in our program - wrote in "Funny - The Book" "lewis carroll wrote logic textbooks and john cleese says a course in logic at cambridge university was critical to his career because the crazier the world you create the clearer its parameters have to be."

When we direct comedy we define and establish for the audience the logic and rules of the world we are creating and then we follow that logic relentlessly -- MY DEFINITION OF COMEDY IS - CLICK

"COMEDY IS A LOGICAL OBJECTIVE
PURSUED TO AN ILLOGICAL EXTREME"

BK

MY ADVICE IN DIRECTING COMEDY IS TO FIND THE LOGIC....FOLLOW THE LOGIC -
CLICK



FOLLOW THE LOGIC
to the end of the line...
and then go
ONE STEP BEYOND

LOGIC IS IMPORTANT - Rules are important - people should follow them, but they don't --

In tragedy someone dies because a rule isn't followed...we feel the pain of the loss and (theoretically) remember to follow the rule in the future

someone follows the rule too rigidly and we laugh at him for his overzealousness – and yet, we are reminded of the rule he was eager to enforce.

AS IN THIS EXAMPLE FROM THE OFFICE



WE'VE TALKED ABOUT TRUTH -- LET'S NOT FORGET THE OTHER HALF OF VORHAUS'
DICTIM -- CLICK



LOOK FOR PAIN

the particular kind of pain that lights up the comic centers in the brain

CLICK

COMIC PAIN

- Often Self-Inflicted
- Could be Prevented or Remedied
- Cannot be "Felt"

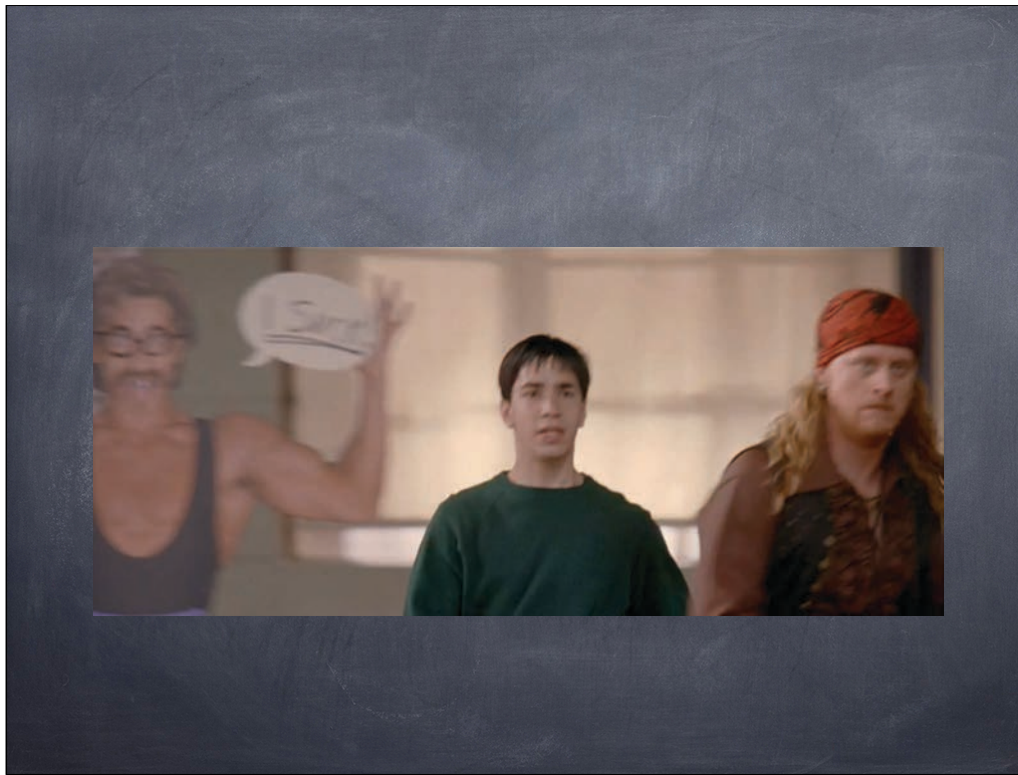
Someone said Comedy is the pleasurable anticipation of someone else's pain

CLICK - It's not Fatal --- CLICK

Comic Actors have to "Feel no Pain" They have to be like rubber balls and bounce back. (like a drunk "feeling no pain")

Sometimes the pain is emotional like in the scene with John C Reilly from Cyrus

Sometimes it's physical taken to extremes...



I think often -- Comedy is self-inflicted pain where the remedy is at hand. BK

as in this scene from Talladega Nights



In both of these examples there is an element of impossibility – of absurdity – of something we tend to call exaggeration...

EXAGGERATION vs EXCESS

PEOPLE THINK THAT MAKING COMEDY HAPPEN INVOLVES EXAGGERATION -- I PREFER TO THINK OF IT AS IDENTIFYING EXCESS --

AN EXCESS IN A HUMAN QUALITY PLAYED OUT IN THE SOCIAL SPHERE IS FUNNY

RIP TORN'S DODGEBALL COACH HAS AN EXCESS OF ZEAL FOR THE TEACHING OF DODGEBALL

WILL FERRELL'S RACECAR DRIVER HAS AN EXCESS OF GRIEF OVER HIS ACCIDENT -- SO MUCH GRIEF THAT HE LOVES IT AND DOESN'T WANT TO LET IT GO

These "absurd" EXCESSIVE examples are stand-ins for more mundane examples of such social transgressions -- the size of the transgression opens up the comic distance that allows us to view the behavior objectively - and laugh

COMIC EXCESS

- ENERGY - CONSTANT
- INTENSITY - RELENTLESS
- NEED - INSATIABLE
- ANGER - EXCESSIVE & INEFFECTUAL
- GRIEF - DISPROPORTIONATE OR ETERNAL

COMIC EXCESSES LIKE THESE - CLICK FIVE TIMES

WHAT ABOUT EXAGGERATED CHARACTERS



COMIC
CHARACTERIZATION
CONCENTRIC CIRCLES

TALK ABOUT DIMENSIONALITY AND THEORY OF CONCENTRICITY
LET'S REVIEW AGAIN -- CLICK TWICE

The Keys to Directing Comedy PART 2:

- CREATE THE WORLD FOLLOW ITS LOGIC
- LOOK FOR PAIN
- KEEP A COMIC DISTANCE
- FIND THE EXCESS
- MAKE CONCENTRIC CIRCLES

SO Let's review the Steps

The Steps

- Casting Friends of Comedy
- Directing the Drama
- Identifying the Occasion, The Governing Social Rituals, Games and Obligations
- Staging: Reveals, Disappearances, Real Estate and Hot Properties

- Nit-Picking Reality and Attending to the Details
- Focusing The Incongruity Gap Imbedded in the Comic Premise (aka "Getting the Joke")
- Exploiting the Physics of Comedy
- Drama Plus - The X Games - Extreme Commitment and Excess