

# INTRODUCTION TO 476

SPRING 2015

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# Directing the Comedic Scene

CTPR - 476

Time: Wed. at 6pm

Place: RCZ Stage C

Instructor: Prof. Barnet Kellman

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THIS IS WHERE YOU ARE – I HOPE IT'S RIGHT PLACE  
I CALL THIS COURSE DIRECTING THE COMEDIC SCENE

# DIRECTING THE COMEDIC SCENE

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I WANT TO GIVE YOU A SENSE OF WHAT THIS COURSE IS -- How it  
relates to 475 and...WHY I CREATED IT

AD LIB



ME

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- how i got here – the course i never had, the book that doesn't exist
- HISTORY OF TEACHING COMEDY...

- how much i love what i do – i hope no matter how challenging the work is or i can be – i manage to communicate how much damn fun you can have making funny things happen.

IN THE ROOM WE HAVE:

UNDERGRADS FULFILLING 475 [CLICK](#)

- UNDERGRADS FULFILLING 475
- PRODUCTION GRADS INTERESTED IN COMEDY
- WRITING GRADS INTERESTED IN COMEDY AND THE ACTORS' PROCESS
- STUDENTS PURSUING THE COMEDY@SCA PATHWAY!

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PRODUCTION GRADS INTERESTED IN COMEDY  
WRITING GRADS INTERESTED IN COMEDY AND UNDERSTANDING THE  
ACTING PROCESS

Comedy@SCA

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Explain - Subscribe - Join Club

# Becoming a Director

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who thinks they want to direct? (count 'em) the only way i know how to do this is demonstrate the highest prof standards... i do this out of respect for you and your aspirations. I will treat you as early career professionals. I may even forget that you're undergraduates  
If you know that you don't ever expect to direct and are approaching this class with other goals...feel free to let me know privately if you wish...

# The Extra Hour

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is not enough..... explain the ambition....

-- THE GOALS OF THIS COURSE ARE



# COURSE GOALS

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TO SHARPEN YOUR ABILITY TO CAST AND DIRECT ACTORS FOR  
COMEDY - CLICK

# TO SHARPEN THE DIRECTOR'S ABILITY

- CAST AND DIRECT ACTORS FOR COMEDY
- INVESTIGATE THE SCENE -- AND DELIVER ITS EVENT

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AND TO LEARN HOW TO INVESTIGATE AND INTERPRET A SCRIPTED  
SCENE

# INTERPRETATION

SCRIPTED, DIALOGUE-DRIVEN

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FOR MANY OF YOU IT WILL BE THE FIRST TIME YOU ARE DEALING WITH DIALOGUE...

FOR MANY OF YOU IT WILL BE THE FIRST TIME YOU ARE DIRECTING A SCENE YOU DIDN'T WRITE –

FOR MOST OF YOU IT WILL BE THE FIRST TIME YOU ARE DIRECTING MATERIAL YOU DIDN'T EVEN CHOOSE!

# Opportunity

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This is a great opportunity to isolate certain crucial elements of the director's craft. You will be working with proven material...material with depth and substance...you won't have to rewrite it – you won't be able to rewrite it, you won't be able to shoot around it...you will have to learn how to realize it

# DIRECTING A SCENE

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YOU WILL BE SURPRISED AT HOW RICH, COMPLEX AND REWARDING AN ENDEAVOR THAT CAN BE –  
EACH OF YOU WITH SPEND THE ENTIRE SEMESTER FOCUSED ON JUST ONE SCENE

ONE SCENE  
PER SEMESTER!

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WHAT???!!! YOU'RE THINKING -- HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE? HOW CAN YOU SPEND THAT MUCH TIME ON JUST A COUPLE OF PAGES? that's because...click

You don't know  
what you don't know...

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The point is that there is much more going on in a good scene -- a scene worth shooting -- than you are likely to realize at this point. My goal is to help you see what is there...and to begin to be able to do the forensic that will allow you to see what's there on your own. I warn you know -- the journey we are beginning tonight isn't easy...it will require - click 4 times

- TIME
- PRACTICE
- PATIENCE
- A THICK SKIN

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clicks -- Why a thick skin...THE LEARNING CURVE IS STEEP i will try not to be unkind....but my critiques are very specific. when we get to in-class rehearsals, I will be pointing out things you have overlooked. Many of you are perfectionists. You set high standards and expectations for yourself. You may find yourself feeling embarrassed or frustrated. It is not my desire to embarrass you – nonetheless, it may happen. when i'm moving quickly, or get over-excited or because i'm trying to cover a lot of ground, i may seem brusque..Let me apologize in advance .Please don't take it personally... don't let me shut you down... The challenge for you will be to get past these feelings as quickly as possible and, instead of thinking "I made a mistake," embrace the learning moment. That's the process. That's the game we're here to play. ok?



# WELCOME TO COMEDY

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Also you will discover that you need all the time you can get on a scene to find the funny. To mine its comic opportunities. Because comedy, by its nature requires degrees of detail, precision, exactitude and minute examination that exceeds the requirements of other forms. it's less forgiving than drama..They're either laughing or they're not!

another thing that will take time is getting rid of MISCONCEPTIONS most people bring to Comedy

# MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT COMEDY

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

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CLICK 3 TIMES

**People think comedy is random...that logic is optional...that reality gets in the way of comedy**

CLICK 4 TIMES

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

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that Comedy must be big...that it's all improvised...and that Funny equates with Silly

CLICK 3 TIMES

Also

- COMEDY IS ABOUT TRIVIAL THINGS
- COMEDY IS EASY

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Also that Comedy is about Trivial Things...and finally, most incorrectly, they think that comedy, because it's fun, is easy  
These, as i said, are MISCONCEPTIONS

Let's start by examining the notion that Comedy is easy: Listen to  
Jerry Seinfeld

The logo for The New York Times Magazine, featuring the title in a white, gothic-style serif font centered on a dark, grid-patterned background.

The New York Times Magazine

presents

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THAT'S GREAT COMIC WRITING -- Let's examine just a few of the points Jerry made

# Jerry's Lessons

- “I like the first line to be funny right away”
- “7 words - four of them are funny”
- “Oh, he’s telling us a story!”
- “..get there quickly..you shave syllables”
- “The biggest laugh has to be at the end”

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4 clicks then change slide and five clicks



TWO YEARS

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Jerry said he worked on that for TWO YEARS!

Let's imagine the pop-tart joke is your scene. If you had to write it, it might take two years.

Given that metric, I hope you can start to understand why we might take a semester to figure out how to realize the scene.

The First thing we have to do is **BREAK IT DOWN**

# BREAK IT DOWN

DIGEST IT

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JERRY CAN'T TELL HIS WHOLE STORY AT ONCE -- WHAT WOULD THAT WOULD BE?

“WOW, POP TARTS ARE GREAT!”

LIKEWISE AN ACTOR CAN'T ACT A WHOLE MOVIE OR EVEN A WHOLE SCENE AT ONCE

A DIRECTOR CAN'T DIRECT A WHOLE MOVIE OR EVEN A WHOLE SCENE AT ONCE

IT HAS TO BE BROKEN DOWN INTO MOMENTS, INTO SPECIFIC DETAILS, CHOICES AND ACTIONS

LET ME ASK YOU A QUESTION:



How do you eat an  
Elephant?

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ANYBODY KNOW HOW YOU EAT AN ELEPHANT

ONE BITE  
AT A TIME!!!

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LET'S TURN THAT NOTION INTO A RULE -- LET'S REMEMBER THAT  
RULE WITH A SLOGAN

HOW  
DO YOU EAT  
AN  
ELEPHANT?

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THIS COMMON SENSE SLOGAN REMINDS US TO BREAK OUR SCENES  
DOWN...INTO

- MOMENTS
- BEATS
- JOKES
- AN EVENT

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MOMENTS -- BEATS - JOKES - AN, FINALLY, AN EVENT -- You'll hear much more about all of this later....DON'T WORRY - I WILL REPEAT THE CONCEPTS OF THIS CLASS OVER AND AGAIN  
So: WE WILL LEARN HOW TO DO SCENE BREAKDOWN THROUGH HOMEWORK, AND ACTIVE INVESTIGATION

- HOMEWORK ---- SCENE ANALYSIS
- INVESTIGATION & EXPLORATION -----  
IN REHEARSAL

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CONTRARY TO COMMON FILM-SCHOOL MISCONCEPTION REHEARSALS  
ARE NOT FOR PRACTICING LINE READINGS AND GIVING BLOCKING

# REHEARSAL

- NOT FOR LEARNING LINES
- NOT FOR GIVING BLOCKING

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# WE USE REHEARSAL

- TO CREATE “PLAY” SPACE
- TO EXPLORE BEATS AND MOMENTS
- TO PENETRATE THE SURFACE OF THE SCENE
- TO EXPLORE THE COMIC POSSIBILITIES OF THE SCENE

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WE HAVE MUCH MORE IMPORTANT USES FOR REHEARSAL:

CLICK FOUR TIMES

CLICK TWICE THRU BLANK – AND FOUR MORE

- TO DEVELOP PERFORMANCE
- TO SET, MAINTAIN AND REPAIR COMIC TONE
- TO STAGE AND FRAME THE GAGS AND JOKES
- AS ORGANIC PREPARATION TO SHOT DESIGN

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**CLICK 4 TIMES**

**REHEARSALS ARE FOR TRIAL AND ERROR (Scientific Method) – AND ERROR IS A GOOD THING!!!**



REHEARSALS  
ARE  
TRIAL & ERROR

WHERE WE MEET FAILURE  
AND MAKE HIM OUR FRIEND

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FAILURE IS A FRIEND WHO WILL GUIDE US TO SUCCESS – AS WINSTON CHURCHILL SAID:

“Success consists of going  
from failure to failure  
without loss of enthusiasm.”

Churchill

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or as Mike Nichols reminds us: “Failure is not a bullet. It’s not something that paralyzes you. It’s something you can learn from.” **REHEARSALS ARE THE PLACE TO FAIL OUR WAY TO SUCCESS**  
**REHEARSALS ARE WHERE WE UNWRAP OUR SCENES -- IN THIS COURSE REHEARSAL IS OUR PROCESS**  
**TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS CLASS -- MAKE AS MANY MISTAKES AS YOU CAN**

THIS COURSE IS ABOUT  
PROCESS  
NOT PRODUCT

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IN HERE WE ARE IN TRAINING - WE ARE LEARNING A WORK PROCESS

# WE LEARN

HOW TO BUILD A PROCESS

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...an approach....a discipline...a workout...a work ethic...

something that will sustain us as we log the 10,000 hours that leads to mastery

HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE 10,000 HOURS?

# LOGGING 10,000 HOURS

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from Malcolm Gladwell's OUTLIERS --- the story of success -HE TALKS ABOUT BILL GATES, THE BEATLES, WORLD-CLASS ATHLETES...HE SORTS THROUGH GROUPS OF PEOPLE WITH EXCEPTIONAL TALENT AND EXPLAINS WHY SOME SUCCEED AND OTHERS FAIL TO REACH THEIR POTENTIAL - IN IT HE QUOTES A NEUROLOGIST who says based on studies:

“...ten thousand hours of practice  
is required to achieve  
the level of mastery associated  
with being a world-class expert in anything”

neurologist Daniel Levitan

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THIS POINT IS IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT GOD-GIVEN TALENT AND  
NATURAL ABILITY

IT'S NOT JUST  
HAVING  
GOOD IDEAS.....

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TO BECOME A MASTER..

# TO BECOME A MASTER AT ANYTHING...

- YOU HAVE TO LOG THE HOURS
- YOU HAVE TO PRACTICE A LOT
- YOU HAVE TO FAIL A LOT

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CLICK THREE TIMES

I WILL BET THAT -- NO MATTER HOW TALENTED YOU ARE -- NONE HAS LOGGED YOUR 10,000 HOURS. PENN & TELLER SAY THEY HAVE 20,000 HOURS





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SO LET'S RECOGNIZE THE FACT THAT YOU ARE HERE AT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR 10,000 HOURS...YOU'RE BEGINNERS – AND THAT'S A GOOD THING...A THING TO EMBRACE. YOU'RE LUCKY -- I ENVY YOU – ENJOY IT – AND FIGURE OUT WHERE AND HOW YOU ARE GOING TO GET THE 10,000 HOURS YOU NEED TO SUCCEED

# HOW DO YOU PRACTICE DIRECTING?

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IT'S EXCITING – BUT IT'S ALSO DAUNTING TO CONTEMPLATE ALL THE WORK AHEAD – THAT'S WHY YOU HAVE TO DEVELOP A PROCESS – A PRACTICE – THAT YOU ENJOY...THAT MAKE THOSE HOURS A KIND OF PLEASURE.

I PLAN TO TEACH YOU HOW THE REHEARSAL PROCESS CAN BECOME A KEY COMPONENT IN LOGGING YOUR HOURS AND MASTERING THE CRAFT OF DIRECTING

**THIS COURSE  
IS LIKE ONE BIG  
REHEARSAL  
IT'S A WORKSHOP!**

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**HERE'S HOW THE COURSE BREAKS DOWN**

# COURSE COMPONENTS

- LECTURES, EXERCISES, READINGS
- SCRIPT ANALYSIS -- ONE FILM\*
- ASSIGNED SCENES - SCENE ANALYSIS

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DO THE BULLETS

- CASTING WORKSHOP
- REHEARSAL WORKSHOP
- SCENE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET
- TWO IN-CLASS REHEARSALS

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The in-class rehearsal will be the product of at least four hours of outside rehearsals on your part. Then you mount your rehearsal in class. It is not a performance or a presentation of finished. I expect you to dive in and work the material and your actors in front of the class. Eventually I will step in and offer my suggestions and even work the scene myself by way of demonstration. These are the key events of the class learning experience. They are intense and rich sessions for which you must come prepared.

- SHOOTING AND EDITING SCENE
- IN CLASS SCREENING/CRITIQUE
- REFLECTIONS
- BLOG POSTS

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CLICK FOUR MORE TIME

# TEXTS

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- DIRECTING ACTORS - Judith Weston
- THE COMIC TOOLBOX - John Vorhaus
- HANDOUTS

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# THE SCRIPT

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# 50/50 by Will Reiser

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Explain the concept of one film...Responsibility For The Whole Story  
-- .identify this film as comedy  
why i chose it....

Play the drama in comedy and the comedy in drama – or Jack Oakie's  
Rule of "When the situation (or line) is funny play it straight. When the situation (or line) is  
straight then you add the comedy"

# SLOGANS

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TO HELP SOLIDIFY OUR LEARNING WE WILL USE MORE SLOGANS --  
WHICH ARE SIMPLE IDEAS FOR COMPLICATED PEOPLE ---  
IT IS VERY HARD TO BE SIMPLE ----

Simple  
Isn't  
Easy

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THAT'S ANOTHER LESSON - DIRECTORS NEED TO



KEEP IT SIMPLE!!!!

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THAT'S A SLOGAN! -- simple is beautiful – for any of you Steve Jobs fans, Steve said. “Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.”

AND IT'S THE KEY TO DIRECTORIAL COMMUNICATION!

# DIRECTORS MUST COMMUNICATE

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DID YOU EVER GET LOST AND ASK SOMEONE FOR DIRECTIONS....?  
AND WHAT CAME BACK AT YOU WAS SO COMPLICATED...CONVOLUTED... THAT YOU  
JUST SHUT DOWN, GAVE UP TRYING TO FOLLOW -- NODDED AND SMILED , THANKED  
THEM AND MOVED ON?  
NAPOLEON SAID

“Orders must not be easy to understand.  
They must be impossible to misunderstand.”

Napoleon

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HE WAS TALKING ABOUT WAR  
MAKING A MOVIE IS GOING TO WAR  
SOME OF YOU MAY FEEL TALKING TO ACTORS IS LIKE GOING TO WAR  
ONE OF OUR UNDERTAKINGS IS THIS COURSE IS LEARNING TO  
SIMPLIFY DIRECTORIAL COMMUNICATION.  
SO.... WHEN TALKING TO ACTORS WE WILL

KEEP IT SIMPLE!!!!

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IF YOU ARE LISTENING CAREFULLY YOU'LL NOTICE THAT THIS SOUNDS LIKE COMMON SENSE



# COMMON SENSE

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**I BELIEVE THAT** Directing is the marshaling of common sense. It is the mastery of the simple. It is the observing of the obvious. Unfortunately these are not easy things to do.

Most of us have common sense. That's why they call it "common". Often, however, we ignore it. In directing we do so at our peril.

**THIS COURSE INVITES YOU TO AWAKEN AND DEVELOP YOUR MOST UNDERRATED SENSE - YOUR COMMON SENSE AND BE GUIDED BY IT - -- WE HAVE TO BE WARY OF THE TENDENCY TO INTELLECTUALIZE**

# BEWARE OF INTELLECTUALIZATION!

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DIRECTING INVOLVES THE USE OF INTELLIGENCE, BUT IT IS NOT AN INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY.

OFTEN THE KIND OF CRITICAL THINKING YOU HAVE BEEN REWARDED FOR IN ALL OF YOUR SCHOOLING TO DATE WILL GET IN THE WAY OF THIS COMMON SENSE APPROACH TO DIRECTING -- IN THIS CLASS WE WILL BE REMINDED TO

K.I.S.S.

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A SHORT-HAND SLOGAN! – DON'T YOU LOVE IT?

## WHAT TO EXPECT:

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STUDENTS FIND MY CLASSES INTENSE. THEY USUALLY COME IN FEELING GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES AS DIRECTORS. AND YOU SHOULD – YOU’VE COME A LONG WAY TO GET HERE BUT REMEMBER – YOU’RE STILL BEGINNERS AND YOU ARE BEING HELD TO WORLD-CLASS STANDARDS

# WORLD-CLASS STANDARDS

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SOMEWHERE DURING THE CLASS YOU ARE LIKELY DESPAIR...BUT BY THE TIME THE CLASS IS OVER MY STUDENTS TELL ME THEY ARE SURE THEY ARE ON THEIR WAY TO BECOMING BETTER DIRECTORS THAN BEFORE

## Who Shouldn't Take This Course?

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not for the casual hobbyist....not for schedule convenience...not the best way to fulfill a requirement.

Those who are committed to being challenged and challenging themselves, however, will be rewarded.

--- ONE LAST DISCLAIMER -- WHAT I'M TEACHING HERE IS THE WAY I WORK....

I said: **MY WAY**

NOT **THE** WAY

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IT HAS WORKED WELL FOR ME – IT’S MY PROCESS – “CANNIBALIZE ME”  
– TAKE WHAT YOU LIKE, LEAVE THE REST...SEE WHAT FEELS GOOD TO  
YOU..TAKE IT MAKE IT YOUR OWN AND MOVE ON...

# DISCLAIMER

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# Comedy is Controversial by Nature

ONE OF ITS FUNCTIONS IS TO TEST  
MORAL AND SOCIAL BOUNDARIES

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**MATERIAL SHOWN  
IN THIS CLASS MAY  
OFFEND**

BE AWARE OF THIS POSSIBILITY  
BEFORE COMMITTING TO TAKE THIS CLASS

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**BREAK**

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**AFTER A BREAK WE'LL DO OUR FIRST EXERCISE...AND BEGIN TESTING  
BOUNDARIES**