

## USE2316: SATIRES AND (UN)SERIOUS HISTORIES AY 2013/14, Semester 2

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This module examines social and political satire across a broad range of historical eras and cultural settings. Our approach is primarily historical and ethnographic, and rests on the idea that there exist various and diverse traditions of satire, each deeply embedded in their own social and political contexts. Rather than treating satire as mere commentary upon culture and politics, we examine it as a particular form of social practice that can shape and transform politics and culture. We explore throughout the question of whether satires can in fact be viewed as unique historical and cultural texts that reveal certain dynamics and truths that more “serious” documentation cannot.

### IMPORTANT NOTE:

The aim of this module is to take a scholarly, critical approach to various examples, ideas and practices of satire. By definition, satire involves mockery, ridicule, and sometimes insult. Your personal reactions to the satires you encounter may vary: you may find some to be hilarious, trenchant social and political critique. Others may strike you as off-target, confusing, in poor taste, or even offensive. You do not need to deny or suppress your personal reactions to the material. I do ask, however, that you try to use your own reactions as a starting point to ask broader and deeper questions about satire. For example: what might your reaction suggest about how satire “works,” and about its intended (and unintended) effects? If satire is intended to offend or provoke, then how, who, why, and to what effect? How are the audiences, targets, and contexts of satire created? What aspects of your own background and the social and historical context in which you live might cause certain types of satire to resonate with you, and others not to?

### TEXTBOOKS:

Y.B. Mangunwijaya, *Durga/ Umayi: A Novel* (trans. Ward Keeler). Seattle: University of Washington Press/ Singapore University Press, 2004.

(Available at the on-campus NUS Press office, AS3-01-02. Ask for the student discount!)

All other module readings will be available online.

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## SCHEDULE OF READINGS (subject to revision)

### UNIT 1: GROUNDED LAUGHTER: UNDERSTANDING SATIRE IN ITS CONTEXTS

In this unit, we will be exploring the ways in which specific cultural, historical, and social contexts shape how satire is created, read, and responded to. At the same time, we will look at how satire can travel outside of its intended context in surprising ways, being revived or reinterpreted in places spatially or temporally quite distant from its context of creation.

#### WEEK 1 (14 & 17 January):

Readings:

George Saunders, "The Semplica Girl Diaries," in *Tenth of December: Stories*. New York: Random House, 2013. pp 109-167.

George A. Test, "Introduction," in *Satire: Spirit and Art*. Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991. pp. 1-6.

**WEEK 2: (21 & 24 January)**

Readings:

Mary Douglas, "Jokes," in *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology*. New York: Routledge, 1999. pp. 146-164

George A. Test, "Chapter 3: Satire and Ritual" and "Chapter 4: Satirical Reciprocity as Ritual" in *Satire: Spirit and Art*. Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991. pp. 67-99.

**WEEK 3: (28 & 31 January; no Friday class for Chinese New Year)**

Readings:

Donna M. Goldstein, *Laughter Out of Place: Race Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. (selections)

**WEEK 4: (4 & 7 February)**

Readings:

*Political Humor Under Stalin: An Anthology of Unofficial Jokes and Anecdotes*, ed. David Brandenberger. Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica, 2009. (selections)

Dominic Boyer and Alexei Yurchak, "American Stioab: Or, What Late-Socialist Aesthetics of Parody Reveal about Contemporary Political Culture in the West." *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 25, Issue 2 (2010): pp. 179-221.

Films:

*Hammer and Tickle: The Communist Joke Book*

**WEEK 5: (11 & 14 February)**

Readings:

Mahadev L. Apte, "Humor, Ethnicity, and Intergroup Relations" in *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985. pp. 108-148.

Giselinde Kuipers, "Ethnic Humour and Ethnic Politics in the Netherlands: The Rules and Attraction of Clandestine Humour." In *The Politics of Humour: Laughter, Inclusion, and Exclusion in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Martina Kessel and Patrick Merziger. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. pp. 175-201.

## **UNIT 2: TRANSFORMATIVE LAUGHTER: SATIRE AS SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PRACTICE**

Building on our study of the ways in which context can shape the creation and consumption of satire, we turn to the ways in which satire transcends its role as "mere commentary," and becomes a form of transformative social, political, and discursive practice.

### **WEEK 6: (18 & 21 February)**

Readings:

Jytte Klausen, *The Cartoons That Shook the World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009 (selections)

### **RECESS WEEK (22 February- 2 March)**

### **WEEK 7: (4 & 7 March)**

Readings:

L.M. Bogad, "Introduction: Electoral Guerrilla Theatre in Recent Democracies: Speaking Mirth to Power," in *Electoral Guerrilla Theatre: Radical Ridicule and Social Movements*. New York: Routledge, 2005. pp. 1-42

Ron Jenkins, "Ridiculing Racism in South Africa," in *Subversive Laughter: The Liberating Power of Comedy*. New York: The Free Press, 1994. pp. 79- 104

**\*PAPER 2 DUE FRIDAY, 7 MARCH BY 5 PM\***

### **WEEK 8: (11 & 14 March)**

Readings:

Banksy, *Wall and Piece*. UK: Random House, 2007 (selections)

Film: *Exit Through the Gift Shop*

## **UNIT 3: LAUGHTER AS KNOWLEDGE: SATIRE AS (UN)SERIOUS DOCUMENTATION**

In the final unit of the module, we will tackle a question that we have been building towards in our studies of the contexts and the transformative effects of satire: to what extent does satire provide a window into "knowing" a people, a community, or a society? Can satirical texts and practices function as historical and ethnographic documents, providing us with knowledge in the same way that more "straightforward" documents would? Can these texts, less constrained by demands of realism and propriety, in fact perhaps

constitute a *superior* or more nuanced source of knowledge than the more conventional material that shapes our understanding of the world?

#### **WEEK 9: (18 & 21 March)**

Readings:

Y.B. Mangunwijaya, *Durga/ Umayi: A Novel*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004.

#### **WEEK 10: (25 & 28 March)**

Readings:

Stephen E. Kercher, "Mocking Dr. Strangelove; or How American Satirists Flayed the Cold War, the Bomb, and American Foreign Policy in Southeast Asia," in *Revel With A Cause: Liberal Satire in Postwar America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. pp. 299- 342.

Geoff Martin and Erin Steuter, "'We Support Your War of Terror': Resisting Militarism Through Satire," in *Pop Culture Goes to War: Enlisting and Resisting Militarism in the War on Terror*. New York: Lexington Books, 2010. pp. 167- 192

Film: *Dr. Strangelove*

#### **WEEK 11: (1 & 4 April)**

Readings:

Shzr Ee Tan, "Manufacturing and Consuming Culture: Fakesong in Singapore." *Ethnomusicology Forum*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (June 2005)

Shzr Ee Tan, "Singapore Takes the 'Bad' Rap: A State-Produced Music Video Goes 'Viral'". *Ethnomusicology Forum*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (June 2009)

#### **WEEK 12: (8 & 11 April)**

Final discussions/ Final project presentations

#### **WEEK 13: (15 & 18 April; no Friday class for Good Friday)**

Final project presentations

**\*PAPER 3 DUE FRIDAY, 25 APRIL BY 5 PM\***

## ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:

I expect everyone to attend class and to arrive on time. (I will take attendance at the beginning of each class). **You are permitted three (3) absences from class during the semester without penalty. Additional absences from class will result in a reduction of your course grade at the rate of 1/2 of a grade per absence. (Exceptions will only be made in cases of family or medical emergency).** If you are absent from class for any reason, it is your responsibility to contact me regarding missed class material and assignments.

Papers and homework assignments should be handed in on time. **Unless there are exceptional circumstances and you have made special arrangements with me, half a letter grade will be deducted from your grade for the assignment for each day that it is late.**

This not intended to be a lecture-only course, and discussion will be a major part of each class session. I invite and expect your active participation in these discussions. You will not necessarily agree with the opinions expressed by your fellow students, the class readings, or the instructor, and you should not be shy about expressing disagreement. At the same time, I expect you to treat others with courtesy and to keep an open mind. You should also feel free to ask questions or seek clarification at any point.

## ASSIGNMENTS:

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Once a week, you will be asked to compose and submit one short (1-3 sentences) question based on the readings being discussed that week. These questions are not meant to be simple factual ones (e.g. "What happened in Indonesia in 1942?"), although you are always welcome to ask me these kinds of questions in class. Instead, this is an opportunity for you to develop an original question about something in the readings that surprised, challenged, puzzled, or provoked you. Your questions can be open-ended, and do not need to be ones for which there is one "correct" answer. (They're meant to encourage further discussion and debate!) I encourage you to be creative, ambitious, critical, and skeptical in your questions!

**Your questions should be posted to the online module Discussion Board by 8 PM the day before class. They will not receive individual grades, but you are required to submit them every week, and they will count as a significant part of your participation grade for the class.**

### WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

There are three writing assignments for this module:

**PAPER 1** is a 2-page informal response paper to a particular week's readings. (Each of you will be assigned a particular class session for which your response paper is due). The format and topic of these are open, but your paper should be a brief critical response to some aspect of the week's assigned readings. A good way to approach this assignment might be to first formulate your discussion question for the week, and then use your response paper to reflect upon or attempt to answer this question.

(Since you will be doing an especially close reading of the material for the week when you submit a response paper, I expect that you will raise some of the points made in your response paper during class discussion.)

**PAPER 2** is a 5-7 page comparative essay on two (or more) of the texts we have read for the module.

**PAPER 3** is an 8-10 page research paper on an example (or genre) of satire or body of theory not discussed in the module; OR, alternatively, an individual creative project related to satire. (In the case of a creative

project, your grade will be determined by a shorter reflective essay that you will submit along with your project).

**ASSESSMENT:**

Participation (including discussion questions and in-class discussion):	10%
Paper 1 (2 page response paper; various due dates):	15%
Paper 2 (5-7 page comparative paper; due 7 March):	30%
Paper 3 (8-10 page research paper OR creative project; due 25 April):	35%
Presentation of final project	10%