

WHAT MAKES YOU LAUGH?

WRITING FOR TV SITCOMS

Theory of Laughter

MECHANICS OF LAUGHTER

- Sigmund Freud
 - “discharge of psychical energy”
 - we invest energy in suppressing our feelings about a subject, but laughter can serve as a release
 - Laughter as release theories

MECHANICS OF LAUGHTER

- Physiologists
 - Look at the tangible roles of laughter: chemical, nervous, muscular functions
 - Contracting muscles, expulsion of air

MECHANICS OF LAUGHTER

- Evolutionists
 - Robert Storey's article "Comedy, Its Theorists, and the Evolutionary Perspective"
 - Smiles and laughter are "evolved responses" that developed because they strengthened the gene pool and promoted human survival

LAUGHTER'S FUNCTION

- Evolutionists
 - Human smile evolved from early ancestors' bared teeth display
 - Laughter originated as a bared teeth, loudly vocalized response to a hostile threat
 - TODAY: laughter is a response to a humorous incongruity rather than life-threatening predator

LAUGHTER'S FUNCTION

- Physiologists and Evolutionists both criticize the emotion based, laughter as release theories
- Biology
 - Laughter does not directly cause physical relaxation
 - Accelerates respiration, increases circulation, and raises blood pressure

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Who is right?

THE VITAL ELEMENT OF LAUGHTER

- Tension
 - Psychical energy
 - Nervous excitation
 - Some form of tension is necessary to laughter and to comedy
 - Comedic tension is paid off through a punch line just like dramatic tension has a resolution

CHARACTERISTICS OF COMEDY

- INCONGRUITY
- SURPRISE
- TRUTH
- AGGRESSION
- BREVITY

INCONGRUITY

- When a thought or action is not in harmony with its surroundings
- Two dissimilar motions create tension
- Audience moves from confusion to understanding
- Help come up with ideas by asking “What if...”
 - Kramer becoming a model

SURPRISE

- All humor incorporates elements of surprise
- Jokes create a funny scene which reel in the audience with realistic setup, then give surprise twist at the end
 - “Take my wife.....please”
- Surprise helps to get laughs - save punch lines for payoffs

TRUTH

- Jokes should have a shred of truth that the audience can relate to, or strikes a chord with them
- Be clever and insightful
 - EX: *Seinfeld's* Soup Nazi

AGGRESSION

- Great way to vent frustration
- People and things that create stress in our lives
- Outlet for anger
- Empathetic audience laugh harder when it identifies with the content of the joke

BREVITY

- Shakespeare's *Hamlet* "Brevity is the soul of wit"
- Concise and exact use of words in writing or speech
- Humor must be lean, uncluttered
- Less is more

SUMMARY

- Laughter depends on establishing, building, then releasing tension
- *Incongruity* creates tension
- *Surprise* twist relieves tension
- *Truth / Aggression* increase tension
- *Brevity* brings tension to high relief

TODAY'S ASSIGNMENTS

- See if you can research jokes online that have *incongruity, surprise, truth, aggression, and brevity*
- Brainstorm ideas for comedy
- Preproduction / rehearse for tomorrow broadcast
- Start to edit Music Is Art 2009 material