

THE SHAME OF SATIRE

with David Misch

“Mork and Mindy”, “Saturday Night Live”, “The Muppets Take Manhattan”, “A Beginner’s Guide To Corruption”, “Funny: The Book”; Lecturer: Smithsonian Institute, Oxford University, Yale, Actors Studio, Austin Film Festival, University of Sydney Australia, American Film Institute, Lucasfilm/ILM, USC, UCLA



While mocking society’s foibles has been a comic staple since the poets of ancient Rome, right now may be the Golden Age of satire, with “The Daily Show”, Samantha Bee, The Onion and countless comics (Amy Schumer, Louis C.K., Bill Maher, Sarah Silverman, John Oliver, Lewis Black) hoping to shame the shameless by taking pungent, potent pokes at society’s hypocrisies.

But... does shaming really have any effect? Even many comedians say no, yet pushback’s been harsh – not just the “Charlie Hebdo” massacre but repression of satirists worldwide, from imprisonment of bloggers in China to satire on trial in Germany.

Even in America, satirists are frequently accused of going too far. Generally, they don’t care. George Carlin said “It’s the duty of a comedian to find out where the line is... then step over it.”

One thing is sure: wherever you draw it, your line will be different than mine. So how do we decide when satire goes too far?

With clips and commentary, we’ll explore how comedy deals with society’s taboos and inevitable censorship, from forbidden farts in Afghanistan to the silencing of a South African puppet, along with W.S. Gilbert, Groucho Marx, Richard Pryor, Monty Python, “South Park”, Key & Peele, the Russian Orthodox Church, Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, and two outrageous “Saturday Night Live” sketches written by U.S. Senator Al Franken.

And Mel Brooks’s “The Producers”, a touchstone for controversy from the moment it appeared. To some a hilarious put-down of Hitler, to others a horrifying diminution of the Holocaust, the nature of “The Producers” is still hotly debated.

Most of all, we’ll see how satire gets people to examine their assumptions and pre-suppositions because, ultimately, satire is less about getting you to change your mind than just getting you to think.

Time
Place