

Laughing Hysterically

The American Sitcom from *I Love Lucy* to *The Big Bang Theory*

Room and time: Seminar Room (Attemsgasse 25, Top Floor, SR 34.D2), Wednesday, 15:15-16:45 · **Course number:** 512.332

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan Brandt · **Office hours:** Thur, 4-6 p.m. (Heinrichstr. 18, 1st floor) · **Email:** stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at

Description: The sitcom (short for 'situation comedy') has been described as one of the most quintessential genres that American television has produced. Functioning as both 'comic drama' and 'narrative comedy,' the sitcom can be seen as a unique product of the U.S. entertainment industry. The sitcom is also one of television's most enduring genres, originating in the radio variety show of the 1930s and 40s and experiencing its heyday on television in the 1950s and 60s. Often disparaged as the epitome of mass entertainment, it has also been praised for its innovative formula, making it an essentially televisual art form. This course will examine both the history and the politics of the American sitcom, focusing on early successes such as *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951-67) and *Mister Ed* (CBS, 1961-66) as well as more recent examples of the genre, such as *Two and a Half Men* (CBS, 2003-2015) and *The Big Bang Theory* (CBS, 2007 – present). In addition, we will scrutinize various subgenres such as the 'mockumentary' (*Modern Family*, ABC, 2009 – present), the 'cringe comedy' (*Arrested Development*, HBO, 2000 – present), and the animated sitcom (*The Simpsons*, Fox, 1989 – present). While analyzing the aesthetics, cultural function, and formulaic composition of the sitcom, the course also looks at how the genre negotiates crucial aspects of American cultural identity.

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