

Absurdism and Comedy

The loss of meaning?

An Outline

- Asburdism
- Surrealism
- Surreal Humor

“Absurd”

- One definition: a situation or set of circumstances where an ideal outcome (collaboration, connection, communication) is impossible for various reasons.

Abusurdism by Definition

- Absurdism is a philosophical school of thought that asserts our desire as humans to find ultimate meaning is an impossible ideal.
- We can find certain meaning within life that may help us, but we are not able to find out finally and objectively.

Waiting For Godot



Seinfeld: The Chinese Restaurant

- From season two of the series, in which the cast spends the episode's 22 minutes waiting to get a table in a Chinese restaurant. This is an ideal outcome that becomes impossible when they run out of time.
- There is no ultimate narrative meaning we can derive.

Surrealism

- A movement in art and literature that began post WWI that intentionally worked **to destroy the cause and effect relationship between narrative events. Our expectation for logic are challenged.**
- Figures include André Breton, Salvador Dali, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, and Rene Magritte.
- **Surrealism is both artistic and philosophical; it works from an assertion that words, language, and symbolic meaning are basically arbitrary.**

The Treachery of Images (Magritte 1928 - 29)



Un Chien Andalou (Buñuel & Dali 1929)



The Big Lebowski

(Joel and Ethan Coen, 1998)



Sombra Dolorosa (Guy Maddin 2004)

Guy Maddin is a contemporary Canadian filmmaker who uses surrealism and surreal humor for the sake of emphasizing the absurd.

Surreal Humor

- Surreal humor borrows elements from surrealism for the sake of humor, particularly:
- **The breakdown of causal logic** between narrative or rhetorical elements
- **The use of the non sequitur**, in which one idea is followed by another idea that is not connected.

*The Boy In The Air (2005)&
Mild People In Aggressive T-Shirts (2006)*

Lyn Elliot

- The non-sequitur deploys **Cognitive Dissonance** for the sake of humor.
- This dissonance is usually an odd disturbance on the surface of what might be considered a normal chain of events.
- The non-sequitur is a huge part of contemporary popular culture, but usually it sort of passes

Summary

- **Absurdism** holds that an ideal understanding of the world is impossible.
- Absurdism is not an assertion that life is meaningless.
- **Surrealism** works from the premise that language and symbols are arbitrary, and works to break down the cause & effect relationship between them.
- Surreal humor takes many of the same approaches as surrealism, but for the sake of humor.

Rubber (Quentin Dupieux 2010)

- What are some examples of surreal breaks in cause and effect?
- How is the main character an absurd figure? Does he have goals? What is the logical outcome of those goals?