

Using Comedy

Play and Performance

Postmodern Identity

Outline

- Identity and self-representation
- “the game”, again, and play in real life
- Bringing together improv and satire

Postmodernism

- **Postmodernism most simply refers to a change in awareness about ourselves** that relates to changes in technology and our ability to interact with cultures other than our own.
- This change in awareness is often related to visual communications devices.
- We become aware of new ways of seeing and being seen that change our behavior and expand our ideas about what is possible.

Postmodern Identity

- Because of our changing awareness, the way we present ourselves has changed. We may now be comfortable assuming multiple identities.
- Where identity might typically have been rigid and inflexible, it is now permeable and subject to change.

Lady Gaga



- Lady Gaga presents herself as a performer in a multitude of often conflicting ways:
- Male/Female, Beautiful/Monstrous, Whorish/Chaste

Cindy Sherman



- A contemporary photographer who assumes many commercialized identities for the sake of satirizing them.

Postmodern Identity and Performance

- Postmodernism prizes multiplicity, which can be within ourselves; we may understand ourselves differently when in different environments and with different people.
- This is inherently ironic and can be used for comedic effect, especially within subcultures that are aware of the performance, or are **hip to the joke**.

(Look At This Fucking Hipster).com



Maria Bamford



- A stand-up who smoothly shifts through multiple identities in an environment where her audience is in on the joke, where in another environment it might be considered pathological.

Postmodernism and Power

- Postmodern discussions are sometimes related to how power is exerted, especially in the creation meaning, and how that meaning is used to shape the presentation of political events.
- Because of changing technology, and an increase in the ability for people to document important events, the power to create meaning has shifted from few sources to many.

Lt. Pike, Pepper Spray, and Power



- Because everybody has a video camera in their pocket, the ability for a multiplicity of documentation has grown rapidly.
- This makes it easier to question an 'official' account of an event, especially what its implications are.
- Multiplicity is privileged over Authority.

“The Game”, Multiplicity, and Power

- Remember: “The Game” is a set of arbitrary rules that defines behavior within a scene.
- This can be true of identity as well, except **in the venue of life itself**, playing games with unsuspecting people.

“The Game”, but for real

- Susan Sontag on “Camp”:
 - 10. Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a "lamp"; not a woman, but a "woman." To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand **Being-as-Playing-a-Role**. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the **metaphor of life as theater**.

Sacha Baron Cohen

- Performer who has assumed the roles of Ali G, Borat, Brüno –
- Cohen assumes these characters for the sake of interacting with everyday people. By playing extreme characters, he reveals subconscious bigotries or untested beliefs.
- This is no more true than when he takes his characters to the United States: <http://youtu.be/nSTukGu-Ut4>;
<http://youtu.be/rBkCXJKHotY>;

Multiplicity and Power

- This type of multiple performance can be seen as both critical and adaptive:
- Performers find inconsistencies in contemporary popular culture by assuming a fictive, yet **tendentious character**
- Performers show how to interact with things like racism, bigotry, incompetence, etc. And treat them in-kind.

Multiplicity and Satire

- This type of performance is inherently political, **and those that use comedic modes such as absurdity and irony are satirical by default.**
- **Satire is performative by nature.** It bends 'the game' inherent in our everyday social interactions.

Abel Raises Cain (Jenny Abel 2005)

- Alan Abel invents intentionally extreme characters that he uses to play tricks on unsuspecting people in the real world.
- His performances are inherently satiric; they humorously highlight inconsistencies or flaws in contemporary popular culture.