

PART I.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND CULTURE

Our next unit deals with how the performing arts can be a reflection of the culture in which they were made, and ultimately, how the performing arts hope to make an impact on their culture.

To prepare, answer the following in your notes.

1. What current television shows are targeted to or are popular among teens (name at least 2)?
2. How would you categorize these shows—as comedies, dramas, reality-based, competitions, animated, action, suspense, etc.?
3. Which do you think is the most popular among teens (Ask students in the classroom to get an idea.)?
4. Why do they think this show is important to your peers? In other words, why do they like it?

Now, either using the popular show above, or a different show if you do not know it very well, answer the following questions. You may research it on the internet if you need to.

5. Who are the main and recurring characters?
6. What are the relationships among the characters?
7. Where does the show take place?
8. What are the primary settings (a house, coffee shop, various street locations, etc.)?
9. What is the basic premise (plot, storyline) of the show?
10. What genre might the show be considered (sitcom, serial drama, drama, crime drama, fantasy, telenovela, game show, reality show, reality competition, etc.)?
11. How would you describe the film style (live action, animation, puppetry, etc.)?

12. Are there any other defining characteristics that are unique or important to the show?
13. Which element of the show do you find the most compelling (do you like the most) (i.e., the characters, premise, film style, etc.)? Why?
14. What is a typical scenario for an episode of the show (describe what happens typically)?
15. What issues, ideas or questions are raised by the characters or by the situations in which they find themselves?
16. In what way, if at all, do the characters and/or scenarios reflect the lives of your peers or community? *(complete sentences—long answer)*
17. Do you think they reflect ideas or issues that affect you, your family or your community, and if so, how? *(complete sentences – long answer)*
18. Why do you think this show is presently popular? *(complete sentences—long answer)*
19. What do you think that indicates about viewers or the community of potential viewers in 2013*(complete sentences—long answer)*
20. Do you think that this show is and/or will remain successful? Why or why not? *(complete sentences—long answer)*

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND CULTURE (PART 2)

Remember long, long ago, on one of the first days of drama class, when we talked about “escapism”? Yup, we’re going to talk about it again. As a review, here’s the definition:

Escapism: (1) an activity or form of entertainment that allows people to forget about the real problems of life; (2) habitual diversion of the mind to purely imaginative activity or entertainment as an escape from reality or routine

For a long time in the United States, Americans have yearned for new forms of escapism in their entertainment (which many theorists blame for our growing ignorance). Read the following article and consider how trends in television show escapism in its many forms. Answer the questions that follow.

Gauging Viewer Tastes: A New Dose of Escapism

By STUART ELLIOTT

ABC is joining the other broadcast networks in lightening up for the 2007-8 season.

ABC, part of the Walt Disney Company, is replacing darker, complicated series that viewers and advertisers hated with more upbeat, accessible fare. Examples of the 12 newcomers include "Private Practice," a spinoff from the hit series "Grey's Anatomy"; "Dirty Sexy Money," a nighttime soap opera about an "absurdly wealthy" family in New York; and even a sitcom based on the misunderstood cavemen characters from television commercials for Geico insurance.

The changes at ABC show how hard it can be for the networks to anticipate viewer tastes. The success of several serialized dramas with dark, complex plots — particularly "Lost" on ABC and "24" on Fox — was followed by a flood of copycats.

Almost all, however, are being canceled, which indicates a misreading of the market. The dense dramas being removed from the ABC schedule are "Day Break," "The Nine," "Six Degrees" and "Traveler"; other examples of such failed series include "Kidnapped" on NBC and "Vanished" on Fox.

In many instances, "nobody showed up for these shows," Stephen McPherson, president of ABC Entertainment, said at a news conference, despite positive advance reviews for several of them as well as elaborate promotional campaigns.

By comparison, the series introduced for 2006-7 that have become hits, like "Heroes" on NBC and "Ugly Betty" on ABC, "are all escapist in their own way," Mr. McPherson said.

"There may be a tonal shift in the viewer," he added, and "we just listened to that."

Asked why viewers preferred escapism, Mr. McPherson replied, "Look at the news today," then lightened his tone, adding, "It's sad that Paris Hilton's going to be jailed."

Another reason the darker dramas misfired, Mr. McPherson suggested, was their serialized quality, because missing an episode or two left returning viewers puzzled.

ABC is taking part in another trend evident during upfront week: a penchant for series with science fiction and fantasy themes. One new show, "Pushing Daisies," is about a man who can resurrect the dead, and another, "Eli Stone," involves a lawyer who starts having visions.

Other examples of the trend can be found on NBC, which added to its fall schedule series like "Journeyman," about time travel, and a revival of "Bionic Woman," as well as on CW, which is also launching a comedy called "Reaper," about a young bounty hunter who works for his dad, Satan.

Telemundo said it would extend a training program to help cultivate the next generation of writers of telenovelas, the soap operas so popular with Hispanic viewers. The effort will also seek to train young actors and will be led by Adriana Barraza, who won an Academy Award nomination for best supporting actress for her role as a nanny in "Babel."

A sixth broadcaster, *My Network TV*, is forgoing a formal presentation for meetings with agency executives. The network failed in the last year to gain traction in its inaugural season and is replacing all its programming.

Published in the Business section on May 16, 2007.

RESPONSE

1. Have you heard of any of the shows mentioned in the article? Have you seen any? Are any still on?
2. Elliot says that viewers of 2008 supposedly wanted “lighter” shows, especially shows with fantasy and/or science fiction aspects. Do you think this is still true? Look at your responses from the previous activity, and explain:
3. Do you think shows these days are still “escapist?” Explain.
4. What criteria do you use for choosing the shows you watch (what do you like in a tv show)?
5. To what degree does popular opinion (or the viewing tastes of your peers) influence your own television-watching behavior?
6. Think of the television show you’ve seen most recently. List it here (if you haven’t seen anything recently, it’s homework):
7. What was the plot of the episode?
8. Did you need to have seen the previous episodes to understand the episode?
9. What ideas, issues, or messages were expressed in the episode?
10. How might these illustrate issues or ideas in the news or in the world?

You will share your ideas in the next class.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND CULTURE, PART THREE

Now that we've played around with how modern culture reflects and impacts our culture, it's time to take a look at more serious arts: how major events of our past affect the world of theater.

And now we travel back to...

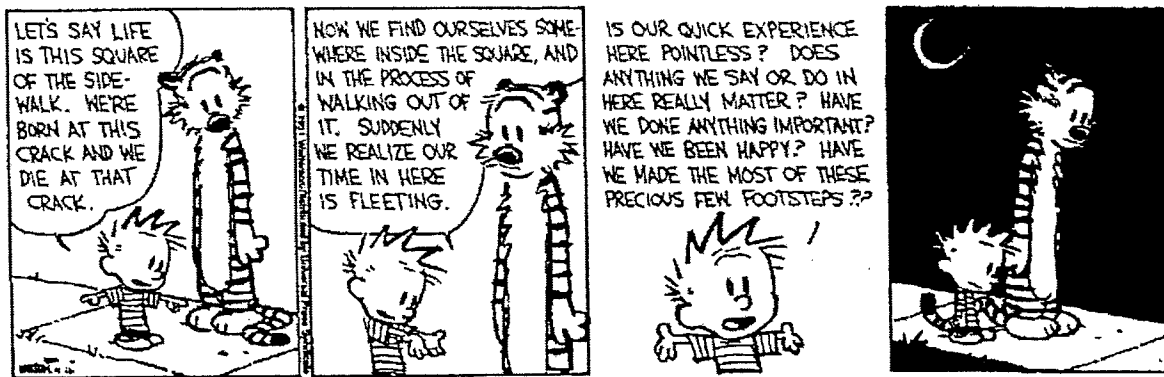
WORLD WAR II, 1939 - 1945

The Effects

- One of the largest and most destructive global wars in history.
- Over 100 million served in the military units
- During the war, economic industrial, and scientific capabilities at the service of the war effort; distinctions between civilian and military lines became blurred
- Events such as the Holocaust and the use of nuclear weapons in warfare resulted in the mass death of civilians

Philosophies

- During WWII, Existentialism was big.
 - **Existentialism:** emphasizes the existence of an individual person as free and responsible; a person is best when struggling to live life the way they want to; often involves questioning the nature of existence



- After WWII, Existentialism turned negative: without the war, and with all of its detrimental effects. People could no longer see *any* reason for existence.
- **Nihilism:** the negation of meaningful aspects of life; life has no meaning.
 - Involves:
 - Life is without meaning, purpose, or value
 - Extreme skepticism.
 - Denies that that reality even exists. Nothing can be known. There is no truth. Values we hold, such as morality or honor, are fake and man-made

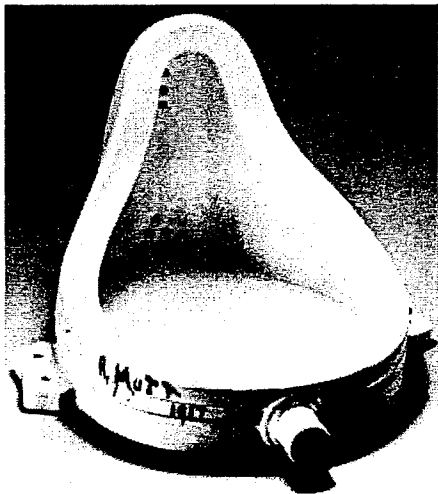


Absurdism: drama or art that focuses on the nonsensical, irrational aspects of life. It attempts to formulate a method of rationalizing irrational aspects in our uncertain world.

- Both life and death are irrational, pointless, and absurd. Existence is imperceptible
- Questions the significance of an individual's role in his or her own life relative to the importance of their actions on the world at large
- Says that life is irrational; and the afterlife is irrational and non-existence

Absurdism captured the sentiment of the 1940s and its feelings of isolation. After the war, people had lost everything and had nothing else to live for. In a sense, everyone had lost. The atomic bomb, and the thousands of lives it ended in an instant, left everyone feeling lost and helpless. Life had no reason.

ABSURDIST ART:



"Fountain" – Marcel Duchamp

ABSURDIST POETRY:

America

Once in English they said America. Was it English to them.
 Once they said Belgian.
 We like a fog.
 Do you for weather.
 Are we brave.
 Are we true.
 Have we the national colour.
 Can we stand ditches.
 Can we mean well.
 Do we talk together.
 Have we red cross.
 A great many people speak of feet.
 And socks.

Gertrude Stein

Vegetable Swallow

two smiles meet towards
 the child-wheel of my zeal
 the bloody baggage of creatures
 made flesh in physical legends-lives

the nimble stags storms cloud over
 rain falls under the scissors of
 the dark hairdresser-furiously
 swimming under the clashing arpeggios

in the machine's sap grass
 grows around with sharp eyes
 here the share of our caresses
 dead and departed with the waves

gives itself up to the judgment of time
 parted by the meridian of hairs
 non strikes in our hands
 the spices of human pleasures

Tristan Tzara

ABSURDIST THEATER

Traditionally, theater provides a standard intellectual and emotionally questioning for the audiences. Consequently, it helps maintain social control by defusing human emotions that might cause disruption to the status quo.

Theater of the Absurd, on the other hand, shook such conventions. It highlighted human life's fundamental meaningless and arbitrariness.

At this point, absurdity had become part of the average person's daily existence. It was no longer possible to keep using standard forms of art – it had lost its validity and no longer seemed truthful.

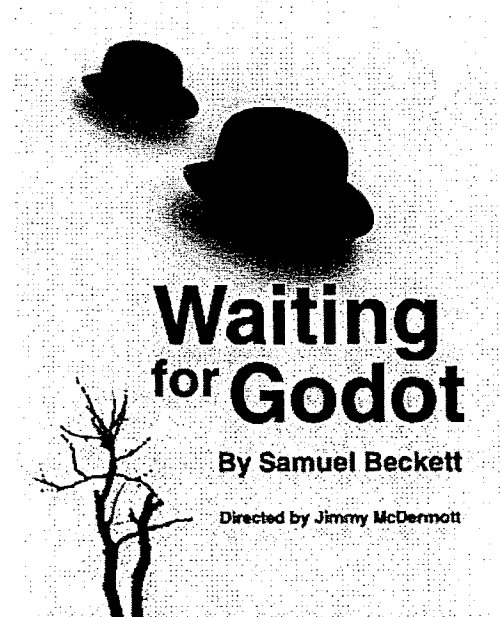
So absurdist theater reflected people's sense of loss: it is surreal, illogical, conflictless, and plotless.

WAITING FOR GODOT: AN Absurdist Tragedy by Samuel Beckett

Vladimir: Nothing you can do about it.
Estragon: No use struggling.
Vladimir: One is what one is.
Estragon: No use wriggling.
Vladimir: The essential doesn't change.
Estragon: Nothing to be done.

In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon are always portrayed to be waiting for a mysterious Mr. Godot (a name that sounds surprisingly like "God"), a man who never appears. Through their dialogue, Beckett enacts the essential concerns and futility of the mid-century human condition. The breakdown in the very foundation of culture is allegorized: Mid-century humanity stood in a crisis in the areas of philosophy, religion, family, sex, government, and economics.

In *Waiting for Godot*, rather than providing an emotional safety valve for the audience, Beckett made it unbearable for the audience by building up those pressures. In the absurdity of the play, the audience is brought face to face with its own sense of meaninglessness in spiritual life. It reflects an era when people considered God, or the idea of him, dead. People struggled with a new reason for existence. They felt alienated and empty, and these feelings are mirrored in the play. While the audience watches Vladimir and Estragon wasting their lives waiting in vain for a Mr. Godot who never comes, viewers catch a reflection of the dull routine and self-deception of their own lives.





Of course, Beckett brightens up the mood with satirical humor. That's why this is a **tragicomedy**: despite this being an overall depressing, hopeless story, it is delivered with wit and an intelligent sense of humor. *Waiting for Godot* mixes what should be tragically nihilistic into a comedic romp, enjoyable for the audience with relief from the philosophical hopelessness it is actually conveying.

Estragon from their depressing lives, but who never shows up. In the same manner, God "abandoned" people during World War II. Godot left the two characters trapped in the repeating endless circle of doing nothing. As Vladimir states, "Well? Shall we go?" and they do not move. Their action is viewed as vulnerable and pathetic, but it captures the uncertainty fo the era, particularly in the last scene, where the viewers are left in wonder of the future of the human race.

Religion. "Godot" is clearly a stand-in for God: a figure who is meant to save Vladimir and

"Let's go. Yes, let's go. (They do not move)."
- Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, Act I

Everything in Act I is repeated in Act II: the coming and going of Pozzo, Lucky, and the boy, just like World War II followed World War I. The way the main characters move back and forth, the ambiguous dialogue and meaningless plot portray and contrast the circular style to the repeated mistakes made by humankind in history.



"We are all born mad. Some remain so."
- Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN WE WATCH:

- To what extent are we personally responsible for our lives?
- Why did Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot? Did they believe in the existence of Godot or did they just prefer to stand around to fulfill the void in their lives and kill time?
- Why did World War II turn the art world upside down in a way other catastrophes did not?
- Can art without traditional form, or structure still be considered art?