

Concrete Comedy: An Alternative History of Twentieth-Century Comedy



Conventional histories of comedy address the verbal comedy presented on stage or screen, or in broadcast media. During the twentieth century, however, there emerged another form of comedy--a comedy of doing rather than saying--that yielded prop-like conceptual objects and gestures of public theater. Termed concrete comedy by internationally known artist and writer David Robbins, its origins date from around 1915, with the work of Karl Valentin, a German comedian of stage and screen who also made comic objects, and Marcel Duchamp, who used the art context as a site as for comedy. Concrete Comedy discusses visual artists (Manzoni, Warhol, Cattelan, Kippenberger, among many others) alongside entertainers (Albert Brooks, Andy Kaufman, Robert Benchley, Jack Benny), musicians (The Ramones, The Replacements, Frank Zappa), couturiers (from Chanel to Viktor & Rolf), architects (SITE Architects) and dozens of other comic imaginations. It offers both an alternative to conventional comedy and an alternative reading of certain abiding strategies in recent art.

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