



It's Not Funny: The Subversive Politics of Comedy Event

Key terms & concepts

Subversion:

A subversion is an overturning or uprooting. Recent writers, in the post-modern and post-structuralist traditions (including, particularly, feminist writers) have prescribed a very broad form of subversion. It is not, directly, the realm which should be subverted in their view, but the predominant cultural forces, such as patriarchy, individualism, and scientific rationalism. This broadening of the target of subversion owes much to the ideas of Gramsci, who stressed that communist revolution required the erosion of the particular form of 'cultural hegemony' in any society.

From A Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations.¹

On Stand Up Comedy:

Stand-up comedy is a contemporary example of the traditional rhetorical situation. A stand-up comedy act features a single speaker standing before a live audience with particular intentions to evoke laughter from their listeners. Examining the rhetorical implications of the recent increase of women using feminist humor in their stand-up comedy specials will provide new insights into the foundational work of humor scholars. According to Meier and Schmitt, "stand-up comedy performance remains one of the last remnants of the rhetorical tradition in contemporary culture" (Meier et al. xxiii). Stand-up comedians are what Meier and Schmitt call "comic rhetors" and explain that comedians interact with their audience with purpose, constructing their language in ways that drive their listeners to a particular reaction, thus making the act both entertaining and persuasive. Historically, women in US stand-up comedy have used self-deprecatory humor, often reaffirming societal stereotypes by enacting them on stage (Auslander 318; Dow et al. 451; Gilbert 320). Charged humor is unpopular in reaching widespread audiences because it draws on content that makes people uncomfortable. Therefore, women who share their point of view as second-class citizens by telling personal stories about being pushed into the margin are less likely to succeed among their male counterparts who address light-hearted issues (Krefting 134). The rising number of successful women stand-up comics addressing feminist

¹ 2018). subversion. In (Ed.), A Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations. : Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199670840.001.0001/acref-9780199670840-e-1343>.

issues in their acts represents the changing rhetoric produced by women comics, contradicting Krefting's claim that "there [is] no incentive to buy into women's points of view [or] any point of view that calls into question the male ideal or the category of the ideal citizen" (Krefting 134). This thesis responds to Krefting's work, demonstrating the ways that women are shattering the traditional comic personae of selfdeprecatory broads, and making successful careers as confident, provocative, sexy, funny women.

From Votruba, A. Redefining feminist rhetoric in stand-up comedy: Offering cultural critique through subversion and silence, 2018²

Useful readings:

[Philosophical feminism and popular culture / edited by Sharon Crasnow & Joanne Waugh](#)

[Rhetoric and Power : the drama of classical Greece / Nathan Crick](#)

[Politics is a joke! : how TV comedians are remaking political life](#)

[Traumatic Comedy and Comic Trauma](#)

[Humour as 'Social Dreaming': Stand-Up Comedy as Therapeutic Performance](#)

[Traumedy: Dark Comedic Negotiations of Trauma in Contemporary American Literature](#)

[The unruly woman : gender and the genres of laughter](#)

[Performing marginality : humor, gender, and cultural critique / Joanne R. Gilbert](#)

More on Robin Cloud:

[Shatterbox Director Robin Cloud Talks The True Story Behind Her Film Out Again](#)

<https://www.robincloudcomedy.com>

More on Kelli Dunham:

[Q&A: Comedian Kelli Dunham on Storytelling as a Radical, Transformative Act](#)

APC Podcast with Kelli : <https://www.sas.upenn.edu/gsws/center/media/podcast/2019/apc-podcast-24-kelli-dunham>

² Votruba, A. (2018). Redefining feminist rhetoric in stand-up comedy: Offering cultural critique through subversion and silence (Order No. 10790840). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2063065119). Retrieved from <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2063065119?accountid=14707>

On Free Speech:

Tina Fey Defends The Importance Of Free Speech In Comedy, And The Right To Make 'Dumb Jokes'

[Standing Up against the Rape Joke: Irony and Its Vicissitudes](#)

[Because I tell a joke or two : comedy, politics, and social difference / edited by Stephen Wagg.](#)

[Can I Say That? Stand-Up Comedy in the Age of Political Correctness](#)