

# Hipsterama: An Existential Caper through the World of the Ironic Hipster

**Genevieve Akal**

## **Abstract**

This is a re-worked section from my fictionalized autoethnography which originally appeared as an MA thesis, a study of the postmodernist subculture of the Ironic Hipster which, unlike earlier ‘modernist’ subcultures, is opposed to mass culture yet simultaneously immersed in it, while also and paradoxically celebrating individualism like no other subculture. Ironic Hipsters spend their days casting ridicule on commercialism, ironically assimilating mass identity constructs and constantly altering their pastiche style to stay ahead of the system and to expose the inherent inauthenticity of mass consumer culture identity. Ironic Hipsters in effect become playful and ironic postmodern texts, inevitably leading to a crisis of self-authenticity.

**Keywords:** irony, ironic hipster, authenticity, mass culture, individualism

## **‘BEGINNINGS’**

FADE IN:

INT/EXT. MOROCCAN CAFÉ - MORNING

SYBIL, a young woman in her mid-twenties, sits at a small mosaic corner-table in a Moroccan themed café. The table sits between two booth seats lavished with decadent cushions. Placed next to her is a black vinyl backpack bursting with books and papers.

*Hipsterama: An Existential Caper through the World of the Ironic Hipster*

Her dark eyes are framed by equally dark long hair, cut in a 1920's up-style. Her lips are painted Betty-Boop\*<sup>1</sup> red. She's dressed in a 1950's circle skirt made of maroon suit fabric with thin neon pink pinstripes; bright pink tulle forms a layer underneath. We see the sleeves of a tight fitting plain black t-shirt underneath a waistcoat. The front of the waistcoat is decadent upholstery fabric and the back is maroon satin. Popping out of the waistcoat is bright pink Edwardian ruffle. A gaudy television-shaped broach is pinned on the waistcoat, and on her right arm is a black leather, gladiator style armband. She wears bright pink legwarmers that start mid-calf and hang loosely over her black and white Adidas sneakers.

She pours mint tea out of a brass pot into an amber glass. Taking a sip she looks around at the other patrons. A Ford Bantam bakkie pulls up outside and BELLA, also in her mid-twenties, clumsily exits the car struggling with her seatbelt and belongings. Putting on a pair of bright yellow roller skates she half-steps, half-skids out of the vehicle and locks the door.

Bella has 'Amelie\*' styled sandy blonde hair tied into two little pigtails with bright yellow 1980's-style bobble hair bands. She wears black lace leggings and a short punk-styled red, yellow and black tartan skirt. Around her waist hangs a black studded belt. She has on a light wool, buttoned up mustard cardigan with black lace showing above the top button from her shoestring camisole underneath. Around her neck is a classical string of pearls to match her dainty pearl earrings. She has a worn leather sling bag.

At the same time JOSH, another twenty-something, arrives at the café on a sector nine<sup>2</sup>. He swerves to avoid the unaware Bella. He stops, flicks up his board, and shakes his head at her ungainly exit before giving her a hug. Josh has brown, curly, perfectly messy hair. He wears a fitted white suit shirt with a thin 'swing style' red tie. The shirt is tucked into black skinny jeans with a black studded belt. On his feet are chunky black, red and gold Adidas sneakers. He wears a black hip-hop style baseball cap with the word 'Hustler' embroidered in gold. Around his neck are two gold 'bling' chains; on one

---

<sup>1</sup> Asterisk means person or thing referred to exists in reality.

<sup>2</sup> A type of skateboard.

---

*Genevieve Akal*

hangs a gold pendant in the shape of a ‘J’, on the other the word ‘Dawg’, also in gold. A suit style tweed jacket is casually held over his shoulder.

Josh and Bella approach Sybil at the corner table and take a seat. They greet each other casually with the familiarity of old friends.

SYBIL

(Self-aware in a Moroccan accent)

Welcome, welcome, make yourselves at home.

JOSH

The suburban girl who wishes she hailed from a place less ordinary, a place where they drink tea out of amber glasses and negotiate the price of textiles on street corners.

BELLA

I wanna be Scandinavian, like from Iceland or something.

JOSH

You just wanna be Bjork\* and live in a lighthouse.

SYBIL

You’d have to lose the roller-skates, what with the stairwell and everything.

BELLA

Whatever guys, I don’t wanna live in a lighthouse, I just wanna have one for days when I feel all Virginia Woolf\* and stuff.

SYBIL

Tea?

JOSH

Cool.

(Noticing Sybil’s backpack)

So what’s all the literature?

*Hipsterama: An Existential Caper through the World of the Ironic Hipster*

BELLA

(Condescending)

Sybil's tryna find herself.

SYBIL

I can't believe you just reduced my self-exploration to that.

BELLA

I'm just joking.

SYBIL

Don't you guys wanna know why we're like this? Why we dress like this and talk like this and-

JOSH

(Raising his amber glass to eye level and looking through it)  
-I wonder if the 'Bell Jar' would read the same if ol' Plath\* had been looking through amber eyes?

BELLA

(Mimicking the way the character Elaine says 'Stella' in the Seinfeld\* episode 'The Pen')  
Sylvia! Sylvia!

SYBIL

(To Bella)

You know, for somebody that detests mindless woman in their kitten heels, you really do have the habit of avoiding a real conversation.

BELLA

Are you scolding me?

SYBIL

No.

JOSH

Yes.

BELLA

Okay fine. Let's unpack our existence. Just know that when you open it up all you're gonna find is a broken TV giving off white noise. We're,

(Clears her throat and puts on a poncey voice)

Ironic Hipsters ... let's leave it at that.

SYBIL

You're being like your mother.

BELLA

Whatever, that's hectic.

JOSH

She's right.

SYBIL

I just wanna know why the hell we're like this.

(Pulling a thin paperback out of her backpack)

There's hardly anything written about 'us', but I found this-

JOSH

-That's because peeps<sup>3</sup> gave up before they started. I don't even know what we are. We're definitely a subculture. It's too complicated.

BELLA

Ooo, let's rather go to hell! Let's go to 'Club Vidamatta' tonight!

SYBIL

You see. You see what you just did there?

JOSH

'Vidamatta' with its pseudo Cuban vibe and vacuous patrons?

---

<sup>3</sup> Slang term for the word 'people'.

*Hipsterama: An Existential Caper through the World of the Ironic Hipster*

BELLA

Yes. Come on guys we had so much fun last time.

(Laughing)

Sybil remember when that guy was flirting with you and you told him that he should walk away because you were too existential for him and he thought you were talking about a country!

SYBIL

I don't know if I'm in the mood to make fun of the little people tonight.

JOSH

I'm keen.

(He puts on a Jock voice)

'Club Vidamatta's' like my fav. Come on dudes, the chicks are so hot.

(He drops the Jock voice)

It's either that or we stay in and watch reruns of 'Snoop Dogg's Father Hood\*'.  
\*.

SYBIL

I'd rather have Kim Kardashian\* explain the death of the subject to me.

BELLA

(Dreamy eyed)

Wouldn't we all.

SYBIL

But that's just it, why the hell do we put ourselves through mindless jock hangouts like 'Vidamatta'? What the hell is the point!?

BELLA

Cos it's funny!

JOSH

Funny ass.

SYBIL  
(Snickering)

It is funny.

(Reluctantly)

Fine I'll go, but only if you two humour me with this whole 'who am I' thing.

JOSH

Cool.

BELLA

Okay, but can I wear your cabaret stilettos?

SYBIL

Sure.

(Paging through a paperback riddled with neon Post-Its)  
Check it out, it says:

Ironic Hipsters are both concerned with, but at the same time take part in, consumer society. The difference, however, is that the Ironic Hipster is entirely aware of popular culture and dislikes it, but their irony is seen when they take part in mass culture, if only momentarily, in order to cast ridicule on it.

JOSH

(Pulling a self-aware gangster hand sign)

Word! And that's exactly what we're gonna do tonight. We all know that 'Vidamatta's' absurd-

BELLA

-It represents everything that we're against.

JOSH

Yeah. It's like free tickets to the best show ever!

BELLA

Exactly! And besides, if the paperback says it's fine then-

*Hipsterama: An Existential Caper through the World of the Ironic Hipster*

SYBIL

-It doesn't say it's fine, it just says that it's-

BELLA

-But if we're aware of the pretence of the place then it's cool.

JOSH

Yeah, we're not being suckered by it.

SYBIL

I guess so...but my irony's running very thin.

JOSH

Thinner than Nicole Richie\*?

FADE OUT.

## **Chapter 1**

### **The Oracle of Irony**

After deliberating whether Josh was dressed smart enough because he wasn't wearing those pointy, nose picking, smart shoes that most guys his age are wearing, they let him into the club. I was stopped short by a protein-induced forearm. Apparently the club prefers the girls to wear high heels. I tried to explain the meaning of my outfit and how without my Adidas sneakers the juxtaposition would be meek to the point of redundancy. I think protein boy thought I was speaking French. He drooled and grew more defensive. So I simplified my argument and pointed out the nearest pair of stilettos explaining that my phat-ass Adidas sneakers cost three times as much. Protein boy didn't seem to buy (or understand) the economic argument either. I gave up and told him I would go home and get some heels. Protein boy was happy to be rid of me. Bella and Josh continued through the club of obscenity and I manoeuvred around the side of the building. At the back I walked until I was under the balcony. I looked up and there was Bella hanging by the



railing. Josh shielded her with his back while she slipped off her heels and sent them flailing through the air toward me.

With my feet squeezed into heels two sizes too small I faced Protein Boy again and gave him a head cant and a girlie smile. He flicked his log of a neck and let me through. I teetered through the herd trying to negotiate tipping glasses, rows of girls with linked arms, biceps, and broken glass. Finally I reached Bella and Josh and I could breathe again. Bella and I exchanged shoes again and the three of us nodded in agreement at the absurdity of the show interlude. Josh and Bella, perhaps noticing an aggression creeping up in me, said that they would go to the bar because I'd been through enough.

Why was I even here? Oh yes, I was being ironic. There's a fine line between irony and melancholy. I looked around the pulsating room. It was like a peacock farm. Everybody flaring their feathers trying to attract a mate. The guys had their chests out like they'd been inflated with bicycle pumps. And too much hair gel. Little spikes stuck out in all directions matching their pointy shoes. The girls paraded with too much skin, too much make-up and too much interest in the guys' conversation. So much talking or shouting, with so little eye-contact, so little being said; like a silent treaty of pretence.

I scanned the room, hungrily seeking out isolated moments in this hive of absurd social pretence.

- Two girls closed in on a guy as they laughed obscenely at his joke.
- A group of girls peered over their shoulders as they followed the discreet directions of the ringleader to look at a guy across the room.
- A guy bought a girl a drink and waved off a large handful of change.
- A girl asked her friend to check her make-up.
- A girl pulled at her under-wire bra and propped up her breasts.
- A guy gave a girl a little paddy whack on the ass, she smiled back flirtatiously.
- A guy rearranged his crotch while another surreptitiously corrected his cockatiel tufts in a mirror.

*Hipsterama: An Existential Caper through the World of the Ironic Hipster*

I was in a state of cynical complacency picturing how funny it would be if I had a Hessian sack of feed. I would walk up to each group and leave a scoop of grain between them. Let them peck away at it. Peck and flare, peck and flare. Then Gwen Stefani's\* song 'Hollaback Girl' kicked in on the dance floor. I jostled to the terrace overlooking the pit of chronically inexpressive dancers. Some girl in a low cut top with a skirt the size of a sweat towel threw her arms in the air and proclaimed,

'This is my Sonnnng!'

She proceeded to 'dance'. The usual unconscious self-consciousness; step to the side and tap with the other foot, step to the side and tap with the other foot, seductively raise the arms and do a slight pelvic sway, flick the hair and entice with the eyes. In fact, every girl on the dance floor was doing the exact same moves, just in a different order.

It was as if they'd all been to a slumber party the night before, and after politely consuming low calorie delicacies and lightly buttered popcorn the Regina George\* of the group would have hustled them to their feet, ordered a change into gym gear and put on a Jane Fonda\* instructional video titled, 'Whorish Dancing for the Unthinking,' with the tag line, 'Scared of being an individual? Just want to have a good time and lure any man? This video is for you!'

There were two of them dancing in a spherical cage elevated in the centre of the depravity. I've never grasped the idea of arbitrary raised platforms in clubs. In theory it's a stage but the show was desperately mediocre. Six feet above the rest I expected more conviction in their performance, but apparently they'd also watched the video.

Animals.

People also put animals in cages. I remembered visiting the zoo and being locked in a perpetual gaze as I watched Max the Gorilla's desperate attempts at avoiding the crowd's stares. At first he sat with his head drooped, his shoulders a picture of despair. A solemn and excessively melancholic repose. With furrowed brows and a measured pace his head would rise and as it

reached the pinnacle of his relentless existence it would sink to the other side. His irises seemed deeply set, like he was holding himself a step back from the surface of things. Slowly he eased up his weight and would trudge to the farthest end of the enclosure where he reassumed his repose with his back to the audience. The hordes with their cameras and greasy sandwiches shuffled to the other side and continued to point and prod at Max's unpleasurable condition. In the same manner he moved again, and so did the crowd along with their inability to register his disturbed body language. This charade carries on day after day, entry ticket after entry ticket. It's a farce for the damned and not once did Max step out of character. He isn't going to give them the satisfaction of seeing his primal self. They want a show but he gives them a showdown. Even if he wanted to, his performance would be melodramatic in this simulated wilderness.

Maybe that's why the two caged women were inadequate. How could they show their true selves in a place like this? After years of conditioning they'd given in. Do they even know? For the most part I've relinquished my disdain and aggressive criticism for the people that those two girls represent. Glossy magazines come to life. Thinking they've experienced a divine moment of honesty because they told their friend that she doesn't look her best with her hair scraped back. Instead of anger I use irony. I think irony means that I don't give up entirely.

We all exist. We all choose. Surely the spherical cage was like the system we live in and those two girls could be interchanged with any human being? Some are indoctrinated with apathy, knighted with a constructed identity, classed according to their possessions and fooled into believing they are unique. Then there are others. They are my comrades. Those that rile against the steel like the jaguar in Ted Hughes's poem.

## **The Jaguar**

The apes yawn and adore their fleas in the sun.  
The parrots shriek as if they were on fire, or strut  
Like cheap tarts to attract the stroller with the nut.

*Hipsterama: An Existential Caper through the World of the Ironic Hipster*

Fatigued with indolence, tiger and lion

Lie still as the sun. The boa-constrictor's coil  
Is a fossil. Cage after cage seems empty, or  
Stinks of sleepers from the breathing straw.  
It might be painted on a nursery wall.

But who runs like the rest past these arrives  
At a cage where the crowd stands, stares, mesmerized,  
As a child at a dream, at a jaguar hurrying enraged  
Through prison darkness after the drills of his eyes

On a short fierce fuse. Not in boredom-  
The eye satisfied to be blind in fire,  
By the bang of blood in the brain deaf the ear-  
He spins from the bars, but there's no cage to him

More than to the visionary his cell:  
His stride is wilderness of freedom:  
The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel.  
Over the cage floor the horizons come.<sup>4</sup>

I manoeuvred my way to Josh and Bella who had finally got the barman's attention. I told them that the jaguar was going to pay a quick visit and they could find me on the dance floor. I prowled into the cage and began to move and sway like an M.TV\* disco goddess. The two girls, the shrieking parrots, managed to make room while doing the pseudo lesbian dance where they stood back-to-back and mildly gyrated each other with orgasmic eyes and a porn star gape. My feet stomped to the bass, my torso elaborated the treble and the lyrics were in my arms. They were clearly out of their depth. They retreated, scolded by the rhythm. I grabbed hold of the bars and rattled them as my knees dipped into a demonstrative Beyonce Knowles\* style back roll. I flung myself in every direction imitating pop movements with an alternative candour. I played up to an imaginary camera, and when I suspended a move between the beat, with my eyes fixed on the audience's lens, they were

---

<sup>4</sup> Hughes, 1972, p. 11.

clearly enjoying the show. The guys were whistling and the girls had their arms in the air giving me props. I danced with increased ferocity, savagely mimicking their lascivious moves, and slammed my feet harder against the steel, sparks shooting out from the base of my sneakers. Still they cheered! Feeding off my energy and adding vivacity to their own cliché.

Bella and Josh were buckled over in hysterics, the only two that appeared to be catching my irony. I increased the spectacle adding a bit of Michael Jackson\* from ‘Thriller’ and some Daft Punk\* robotic arms. Still they grinned like a bunch of deranged Cheshire cats. Amid this absurdity I didn’t notice that the base of my sneakers were melting, I was too busy mouthing the lyrics, ‘Let me hear you say this shit is bananas’<sup>5</sup>, and directly to the audience with outstretched accusatory arms pointing at a different person on every beat, ‘B-A-N-A-N-A-S!’ The cage was shuddering. Bolts and screws shot out in a stop sequence against the strobe. My sweat was blurring my vision. The cage began to levitate. All I could think was ‘why don’t they get it?’ Sure I was a glam pop spectacular but how could they not see my revolutionary edge?! A contemporary Joan of Arc\* wielding a sword against conformity! On the last beat I spun around like Michael Jackson with my feet pursed together. This was the final abrasive move and the cage ignited as it burst through the roof in a flurry of ironic mayhem!

I was flying through space, suspended in the cage as it spiralled around me in a sort of epic slow motion. Silence. Only the shards of neon flashes fizzing past me interrupted the sound of my breathing. My body floated, knees up, reclining in zero-gravity. The steel bars disintegrated. I extended my hand trying to touch the stars that felt just in reach, ethereal flakes of glitter that hovered as if on a universal mobile.

Suddenly, a voice cut short my dream sequence, ‘I suppose you want to know why no one got it’.

‘What?’ I diverted my attention to the left and immediately recognized the office.

---

<sup>5</sup> Lyric for ‘Hollaback Girl’ by Gwen Stefani and Pharrell Williams, 2004, <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/gwenstefani/hollabackgirl.html>

*Hipsterama: An Existential Caper through the World of the Ironic Hipster*

Imitation light oak walls and desk with some scattered fake plants. Fabric off-cuts draped over couches and chairs and hat stands, with a loosely pinned evening dress on a mannequin in the corner. Still in my reclined position, but now on a pink beanbag, I saw the all too familiar turquoise and pink logo mounted on the wall: Spectra Fashions.

She sat behind the desk like an all-knowing oracle. Dressed in gaudy couture, a halo of glorious backlight illuminated her fiery permed hair.

ME  
Sally Spectra?!\*

SALLY SPECTRA  
Surprise!

I looked around but we weren't on the set of 'The Bold and the Beautiful'. I had seen this place a thousand times before. The only difference was that Sally Spectra had four arms. She looked in part like the Hindu goddess Durga\*. Majestically positioned on a baroque inspired furry tiger print throne, her bare foot was folded up over her knee and her toe nails were French manicured. Four arms orbited her being and separated the dusk coloured light into flickering beams. In each hand she clenched a different item; a golf club, a framed picture, a storybook with a cassette tape, and this one made me particularly nervous, a sword.

ME  
Miss Spectra, a pleasure.  
(Sarcastically)  
I'm a huuuuge fan. Am I here to help with this season's showstopper?

SALLY SPECTRA  
No, I've brought you here to correct your misguided impression that irony is infallible.

ME  
Come on Sally. A B-Grade soap opera star telling me about Irony?  
Ha, are you being ironic?

SALLY SPECTRA

No. I'm serious. You need the help. I saw your little dance. Did you think that was ironic?

ME

I thought I was making it obvious but they interpreted it all wrong.

SALLY SPECTRA

'The major players in the ironic game are indeed the interpreter and the Ironist.'<sup>6</sup> You failed to make irony even though that was your intention because your audience, 'the interpreters'<sup>7</sup>, are the ones that decide whether something is ironic or not.

---

<sup>6</sup> Hutcheon, 1994, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Term used by Hutcheon, 1994.





ME

So ‘there is no guarantee that the interpreter will ‘get’ the irony in the same way as it was intended?’<sup>8</sup>

SALLY SPECTRA

Exactly, it would seem you took your audience for granted.

Confused, I tried to wrench myself out of the beanbag which was hell-bent on devouring me. It took twenty awkward seconds of heaving and pulling with the crackle of synthetic leather and polystyrene before I was up.

ME

Look, Sally, can I call you that? Irony is basically saying or doing one thing and meaning something else. So, what we have is a broken telephone situation.

SALLY SPECTRA

A childish metaphor, but yes.

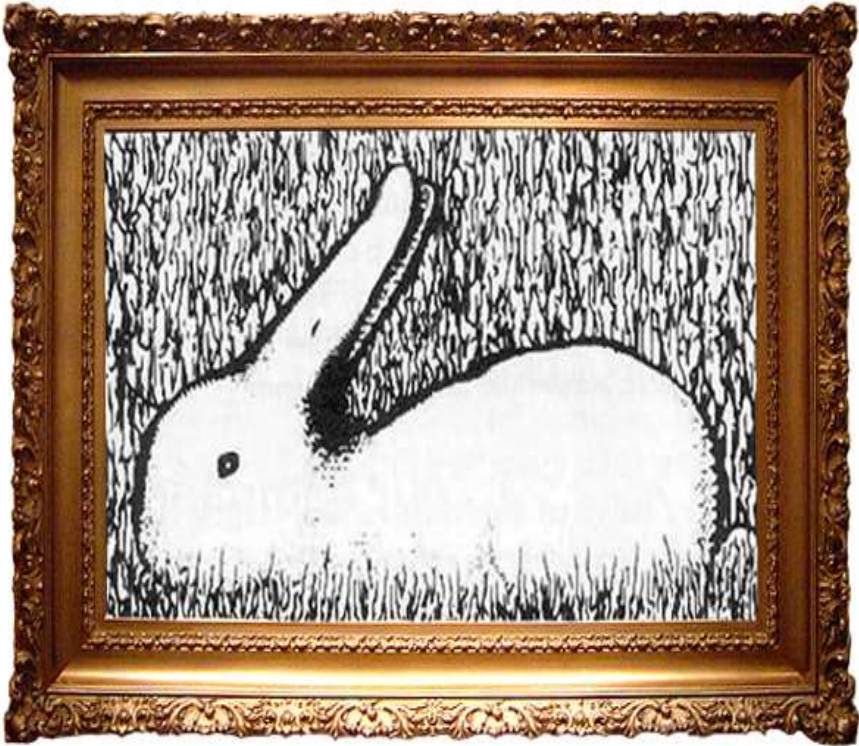
One of her arms came to rest on the table and she skidded the framed picture<sup>9</sup> across the surface.

---

<sup>8</sup> Hutcheon, 1994, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Picture from, [http://www.makku.com/img/rabbit\\_duck\\_3.jpg](http://www.makku.com/img/rabbit_duck_3.jpg)

Frame from,  
<http://www.hampshireantiques.com/painting/images/mooseframe.jpg>



SALLY SPECTRA

What do you see?

ME

Well it's a rabbit ... or a duck ... either or.

SALLY SPECTRA

Physically we can only see one at a time. I would like to propose that when it comes to making ironic meaning it is as if we can see both the duck and the rabbit simultaneously. Think 'of ironic meaning as relational, as the result of the bringing- even rubbing- together of the said and the unsaid, each of which takes on meaning only in relation to the other. Admittedly, this (like most) is not a relation of equals:

the power of the unsaid to challenge the said is the defining semantic condition of irony.’<sup>10</sup>

ME

So when I was in the cage, I intended to be the duck but all they could see was the rabbit.

SALLY SPECTRA

Know this! ‘Those whom you oppose might attribute no irony and simply take you at your word.’<sup>11</sup> Even your two friends, Bella and Josh, they caught your irony this time but in the future they ‘might also attribute no irony and mistake you for advocating what you are in fact criticizing. They may simply see you as a hypocrite or as compromised by your complicity with a discourse and values they thought you opposed.’<sup>12</sup>

ME

Like the time I went to a strip joint. I thought it would be funny. It was... sort of, but every time I dropped the Mafioso I’m-smoking-a-cigar-and-totally-at-ease-with-my-surroundings act, I only felt anxious. I *was* being ironic though. Bella was so pissed off with me. She said that my irony had officially slapped me in the face.

SALLY SPECTRA

Do you agree with strip clubs?

ME

No. They’re seedy dens, the holy places of chauvinism and the objectification of women. They make me ill.

SALLY SPECTRA

Then you shouldn’t have taken part in something so far removed

---

<sup>10</sup> Hutcheon, 1994, p. 59.

<sup>11</sup> Hutcheon, 1994, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Hutcheon, 1994, p. 16.

from your values. Some would say that ‘irony by its nature seems to have the power to corrupt the ironist ... the ‘habit of irony’ is even seen as a ‘corrosive and paralyzing disease of the spirit’.<sup>13</sup> Don’t give irony the power to subvert your own beliefs.

ME

So then...my irony is basically a private joke, a way of communicating with my close friends. What’s the point? It’s merely an indulgent experience where we can show off how clever and counter-cultural we are. It’s a mere ‘communal achievement’<sup>14</sup> of ‘joining, of finding and communing with kindred spirits.’<sup>15</sup> What a bunch of idiots! Down with irony! This whole time I thought I was a revolutionary but I’m just a pretentious-

SALLY SPECTRA

Stop. As with irony there’s more than meets the eye. Do not believe that your irony, which is intrinsically weaved into your way of being, happened by mistake. Irony ‘depends upon social and situational context for its very coming into being.’<sup>16</sup> Your excessive use of irony cannot be separated from your social surrounds. You live in a specific kind of era that demands irony from the counter-culture...If I were to strike this sword at you what would you do?

ME

I’d move.

SALLY SPECTRA

Exactly. As society changes so too does subculture. Your irony is a product of your Postmodern circumstance.

---

<sup>13</sup> Muecke, 1969, p. 242-243, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 44.

<sup>14</sup> Booth, 1974, p. 13, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 93.

<sup>15</sup> Booth, 1974, p. 28, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 93.

<sup>16</sup> Lewis, 1989, p. 35-36. Walker, 1988a, p. 25. Barreca, 1988, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 26.

ME

Even so, it doesn't change the fact that it seems to be a useless skill.

SALLY SPECTRA

'Irony has been seen as "serious play", as both "a rhetorical strategy and a political method"<sup>17</sup>, that deconstructs and decenters patriarchal discourses. 'Operating almost as a form of guerrilla warfare, irony is said to work to change how people interpret.'<sup>18</sup> 'The operating premise here is that "single vision produces worse illusions than double vision"<sup>19</sup>. Your irony is satire that undermines dominant authority.

ME

But essentially my irony cripples me. I'm a hypocrite because I play for both teams. Like your soap opera, 'The Bold and the Beautiful'. I know it's a terribly scripted, melodramatic show that promotes nothing intellectual or morally upright, but I still watch it. Sure there's no sincerity in the act and I take it as more of a comedy, the point is, I still watch it. I'm another viewer for the network regardless of my intentions. I'm a fence-sitter. I'm offered two choices and I choose both.

SALLY SPECTRA

'Which is but another way of saying that you choose neither.'<sup>20</sup>  
'Irony, thus, is always polemical,'<sup>21</sup> 'belonging to the armoury of controversy, and not fitted to any entirely peaceable occasion.'<sup>22</sup>  
Your irony is your 'weapon of contempt,'<sup>23</sup> more powerful than the blade because of its indirection. You and your friends decided to go to 'Vidamatta' for a night of irony. You were as thrilled about this

---

<sup>17</sup> Haraway, 1990, p. 191, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 31-32.

<sup>18</sup> Hutcheon, 1994, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> Haraway, 1990, p. 196, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> Chevalier, 1932, p. 79, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> Hutcheon, 1994, p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> Thirwall. 1833, p. 483, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 40.

<sup>23</sup> Booth, 1974, p. 43, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 41.

prospect as you would be about frequenting a venue that you attend from a place of sincerity because it agrees with your sensibilities.

ME

Okay, yes.

SALLY SPECTRA

If you did everything in earnest, you would hardly cross paths with the masses. Irony ‘allows you to participate in the humorous process without alienating the members of the majority.’<sup>24</sup> You are able to engage but simultaneously your irony stands as a distancing mechanism. You are both observer and participant. ‘It is a mode of intellectual detachment,’<sup>25</sup> ‘that engages the intellect rather than the emotions,’<sup>26</sup> and aggravates ‘because it denies us our certainties by unmasking the world as an ambiguity.’<sup>27</sup>

ME

But why?

Behind a steel door on the right hand side of the office I heard the ascending sound of clanging and heavy footsteps. For a split second Sally’s orbiting glow intensified as her pupils dilated, but she didn’t flinch and remained regal and in control. It was her lips that gave her away, twitching and shifting slightly. There was an abrupt thud as she dropped the golf club and spat out her words at a ferocious pace.

SALLY SPECTRA

If anything remember this! ‘The golf IRON can also be a branding device, one that hurts, that marks, that is a means of inflicting power. To resolve these two IRONs into a third, however, you need only think of irony in the symbolic light of the non-domestic and somewhat less violent golf club known as the IRON: it has an oblique head (the greater its number the greater

---

<sup>24</sup> Walker, 1988a, p. 123, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 50.

<sup>25</sup> Schoentjies, 1993, p. 153-186, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Walker, 1990, p. 24, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Kundera, 1986, p. 134, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 15.

its obliqueness); it is subtle (compared to the alternatives); it works to distance objects. But, it can also miss.<sup>28</sup>

ME

Okay okay, the golf club.

I was struggling to focus. Clearly I was in danger. The disjointed steps had increased to a weighted stride. I still had so many questions. Sally edged me toward the door on the opposite end.

SALLY SPECTRA

Go now!

ME

What's going on!? I still have so much to ask you. How did this happen!?

A figure exploded through the door! Literally through it, like a cartoon character. I couldn't make out his face, but he was wearing a fancy suit. Screaming like a lunatic he executed a series of forward rolls and back tucks. Finally he came to rest in a kung-fu poise with a machete in either hand. A fearsome glare, he was frothing at the mouth, I'd never seen him like this before. Ridge Forrester\* unhinged. With athletic restraint his arm motioned forward as his machete sliced the air and came to rest pointing directly at me. His eye perfectly in line with the blade as if he was looking down a sniper rifle's sight. Simultaneously it glistened and his eye twitched.

RIDGE FORRESTER

Tonight you die!

ME

(Trying to be casual)

Come on Ridge, this is unnecessary. I have nothing against you. How about we talk this through?

---

<sup>28</sup> Hutcheon, 1994, p. 36.

SALLY SPECTRA

She's right. Don't be a hater. Let it go, you can't get them all.

RIDGE FORRESTER

There's nothing to talk about! 'The lesson is clear. Employing irony, speaking tongue and cheek, talking wryly or self-mockingly-these smartass intellectual practices give our whole profession a bad name.'<sup>29</sup>

ME

Well how else am I supposed to cope with your terrible acting? You can't possibly take yourself seriously.

RIDGE FORRESTER

I take myself very very seriously! 'Knock it off, and knock it off now. Nobody understands your little ironies but you and your theory-mongering friends...So just wipe that smirk off your face.'<sup>30</sup>

He extended his blade and launched toward me with a defiant war cry. With death inches away all I could think about was how cool it would be to die at the hands of Ridge Forrester. My gravestone would read 'Here lies a soldier, martyred for irony.' I'd have cupcakes at the service and Barry Manilow\* would sing 'Copacabana' jiving like a ninety year old humanoid. As I was imagining the congregation doing a choreographed dance in unison, Sally lunged forward and shielded me with her sword. Their blades clanged together as the battle ensued. Ridge powered up, and his suit tore as his body expanded like The Hulk\* but his skin turned a murky yellow. Sally pivoted on the tip of her big toe and started to spin so fast she became a blur. When she stopped abruptly her hair stood upright and brushed against the ceiling. Her lips had inflated and as she pulled and twitched her mouth her lips bitch-slapped Ridge in a Tekken<sup>31</sup> style sequence. While Ridge was trying to gather himself one of her arms shook me in to action, while another shoved a

---

<sup>29</sup> Berube and Graff, 1993, p. 3, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Berube and Graff, 1993, p. 3, cited in Hutcheon, 1994, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> A Classic combat videogame.



storybook and cassette tape into my hands. Staving him off with blinding glitter that she dispersed from her hair she yelled at me over her shoulder:

SALLY SPECTRA

Read this when the time is right. You'll have to search far and wide for a cassette walkman they've been discontinued. Now get out of here! Through that door! I'll hold him off! Go!

I shoved the book and tape into my backpack as I heaved myself through the door. Where was I? I heard Sally's warrior scream and the piercing of flesh and organs. I could only hope it was Ridge Forrester who met his end...

## **'BEGINNINGS'**

Continued

FADE IN:

INT/EXT MORROCAN CAFÉ-MORNING

JOSH

(Digging through his backpack)

So what does your little book say about-

(Elaborately revealing a scuffed Skeletor\* figurine)  
this!

SYBIL

That's amazing!

BELLA

I want it.

JOSH

I found it at a flea market.

*Hipsterama: An Existential Caper through the World of the Ironic Hipster*

(Puts on a cartoon villain voice)

Soon my collection will be complete!

(Laughs like a villain)

BELLA

Hand it over.

JOSH

I'm willing to do a trade.

BELLA

Name it.

JOSH

I'll only give you Skeletor for your entire My Little Pony\* collection.

BELLA

What!?

SYBIL

(To Josh)

Have you been smoking crack?

JOSH

(Indifferent)

That's my price.

SYBIL

When did you become the Idi Amin\* of nostalgia memorabilia?

BELLA

Well I spit on it. Keep your precious Skeletor.

JOSH

(Wedging the figurine in a standing position between two glasses)

Fine. So what does it say?

SYBIL

What?

JOSH

(He motions toward the book)

SYBIL

Oh,

(Paging through)

Well, it doesn't say anything specifically about our nostalgia obsession but it's probably part of our,

(Puts on a poncey voice)

unified homology. Wait here it is:

(Reading from the book)

This term was originally employed by Levi-Strauss and it encompasses a subculture's representational fit between the values and lifestyles of a group. These chosen objects 'were, either intrinsically or in their adapted forms homologous with the focal concerns, activities, group structure and collective self-image of the subculture. They were "objects in which (the subcultural members) could see their central values held and reflected"'<sup>32</sup>.

BELLA

Like punks and Mohawks?

SYBIL

Yeah:

(Reading from the book)

'For instance, it was the homology between an alternative value system ('Tune in, turn on, drop out'), hallucinogenic drugs and acid rock which made the hippy culture cohere as a 'whole way of life' for individual hippies'<sup>33</sup>.

---

<sup>32</sup> Hall *et al* , 1976, cited in Hebdige, 1979, p. 114.

<sup>33</sup> Hebdige, cited in Gelder and Thornton, 1997, p. 137.

*Hipsterama: An Existential Caper through the World of the Ironic Hipster*

JOSH

So what's our homology?

BELLA

Amelie, penguins, Sponge Bob Square Pants\*, Kurt Vonnegut\*-

SYBIL

(Laughing)

-Lamas, old people, Tarantino\*, Frida Kahlo\*, Juno\*-

JOSH

-Feeling European, Hunter S. Thompson\*, Snoop Dogg, I heart Huckabees\*-

BELLA

-Bingo, and the way they call out numbers like 'legs eleven'-

SYBIL

-Disdain for Kevin Costner\*-

JOSH

-Vintage-

SYBIL

-Girls of the Playboy Mansion\*-

BELLA

-Tyra Banks\*-

SYBIL

(Gesturing for everyone to stop)

The point is-

BELLA

-I was just getting in to that.

SYBIL

We don't really have a unified homology which is weird. Look at our apartment, it's covered with iconography. And the iconography in my room is different from yours.

JOSH

Well we can't have the same, except for a few crossovers 'cos that would be lame.

SYBIL

Exactly. It says here:

(Reading from the book)

Ironic Hipsters do take part in this society of seduction and imagery, but their difference is located in their choices. They choose to identify with, and be surrounded by, an iconography that pertains to their existential conundrum-

BELLA

-Conundrum, great word-

SYBIL

(Still reading from the book)

-Postmodern iconography and anything that represents a postmodern existence is the Ironic Hipsters' *homology*. This means that the orthodox theory does apply but not in the same sense, 'for it is exactly this homogenous conception of subculture that postmodern subculturalists reject as stereotypical and (by extension) inauthentic'<sup>34</sup>. The Ironic Hipsters' choices are sporadic, unpredictable and steeped with irony according to each individual.

JOSH

my affiliation to pop culture and your affiliation are different-

---

<sup>34</sup> Muggleton, 2000, p. 78.

*Hipsterama: An Existential Caper through the World of the Ironic Hipster*

BELLA

-Because we're so obsessed with being original-

JOSH

-But the point is we all affiliate in our own weird way?

SYBIL

Yeah.

(Reading from the book)

Thus, there are no fixed and identifiable objects that can be pinpointed as being homologous to the Ironic Hipster, but rather, it is highly personalized and the homology would be the process and symptoms of existing as a postmodern being.

BELLA

I dig that. It makes us way more individual than punks or any other subculture.

JOSH

But am I still an Ironic Hipster if...

(He starts singing)

'I like big butts and I cannot lie, you other brothers can't deny-

Bella and Sybil join in and the three of them sing the lyrics like they're in an over the top rap video.

JOSH/BELLA/SYBIL

'- that when a girl walks in with an itty bitty waist and round thing in your face, you get sprung-'<sup>35</sup>

ELI, the waiter walks up. A young man in his mid-twenties, Eli is wearing grey suit pants, a fitted T-shirt with a stencilled print of a plug in the socket

---

<sup>35</sup> Lyric for 'Baby Got Back' by Sir Mix-a-Lot, 1992,  
<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/sirmixalot/babygotback.html>

*Genevieve Akal*

with the switch turned to ‘off’. A red bow tie and original red, white and black bowling shoes finish of the ensemble. He also has an afro. His arrival cuts short their song and they drop it without embarrassment or awkwardness.

ELI

More tea?

JOSH

I’d like to try that ginger and white chocolate tea.

BELLA

And cupcakes! Lots of cupcakes!

ELI

So, like, forty cupcakes then?

JOSH

Nice bow tie.

ELI

Thanks bro.

BELLA

No, like three will do.

ELI

(Noticing the figurine on the table)

Skeletor, sweet.

JOSH

Thanks bro.

ELI

I got Panthor\* the other day.

JOSH

Cool.

*Hipsterama: An Existential Caper through the World of the Ironic Hipster*

ELI

So how many cupcakes was that?

BELLA

Um, three, yeah.

Eli writes in his notebook and leaves.

SYBIL

Oooo, Eli got a sidekick, that's way cooler.

JOSH

Did you see that? I'm so over that guy tryna one up me. Did you see his bow tie? 'Thanks bro', that's what he said. Unbelievable! Like three days ago I told him that I was gonna bring back the bowtie, then he just claims it like that.

BELLA

Eli's so dreamy.

JOSH

And a fraud.

BELLA

I wasn't too obvious was I?

SYBIL

Aside from the drooling and abnormal pitch, nooooo.

BELLA

I'm so pathetic in front of him.

JOSH

We're not tipping him.

BELLA

I'll tip him.



SYBIL

Next time just tell him you're gonna bring back something lame like the yin-yang sign-

BELLA

-Eli's the only one who could make that work.

JOSH

Shut up about Eli! I bet he doesn't even have Panthor. He's probably on 'ebay' right now tryna back up his lie.

SYBIL

Liar liar pants on fire.

BELLA

(Ripping off herself)

Cupcakes! Lots of cupcakes! I can't believe I said that.

SYBIL

I can't believe you don't get this heated about things that actually matter.

JOSH

(Holding his figurine)

Skeletor's way better.

FADE OUT

Thanks to Colwyn Thomas for his illustrations.

## **References**

Gelder, K. & S. Thornton (eds.) 1997. *The Subcultures Reader*. London: Routledge.

*Hipsterama: An Existential Caper through the World of the Ironic Hipster*

- Hebdige, D. 1979. *Subculture, The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.
- Hughes, T. 1972. *Selected Poems 1957-1967*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Hutcheon, L. 1994. *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*. London: Routledge.
- Muggleton, D. 2000. *Inside Subculture. The Postmodern Meaning of Style*. London: Berg.

Genevieve Akal  
Postgraduate Student  
Media and Cultural Studies  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
genevieveakal@gmail.com