

## ***Camp It Up!***

This exercise was created for *American Funny*, but could work for a comedic acting class or even as a generative sketch exercise.

### Context:

Students have read a Charles Busch play and have discussed Theatre of the Ridiculous and some theories on camp.

### Preparation:

In advance, choose short scenes (around 2 minutes long) from classic American stage dramas, the more heteronormative the better. Try to avoid plays that have already inspired camp culture (such as *Suddenly Last Summer* or *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*)

- Some possible plays to draw from: *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, *Glengarry Glen Ross* by David Mamet, *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder, *A Habitation of Dragons* by Horton Foote, *Moon for the Misbegotten* by Eugene O'Neill, etc.

### Exercise:

Cast the scenes and have the actors cold-read them before explaining the exercise. Encourage them to honor the text.

Explain to them that their job is to redo the scene in a camp sensibility. Each group will have a different focus (consider the scenes chosen as you assign these):

- Text: Alter the text to amp up the campiness. You can change as much as you'd like, but the characters and scene have to remain recognizable as source material.
- Parody: Choose an incongruous or surprising genre to perform the scene in. Morph characters into tropes from the genre you've chosen, and commit to playing the voice and physicality appropriate to it.
- Costume: Use any item you have with you (feel free to ask your classmates to borrow) to heighten the campiness. How do your costume choices change your performance?
- Theatricality: Use the space. Enter and exit. Work out physical staging together. What does it mean to really own the stage?
- Sound: Add a soundtrack of recorded music. Ask your classmates to add sound effects. How does the aural landscape build a camp tone?
- Reference: Play your characters as celebrity impersonations or as the celebrities themselves (preferably queer icons). Add in allusions to other people, events, and cultural moments. How does the cultural landscape influence camp?
- Environment: Reset your scene somewhere fabulous. Use object work or found objects to indicate ridiculous excess or trashy beauty. How does location build a campy world?

Have the students perform each of the scenes.

### Debrief:

How did tweaking these specific elements create a campy tone? Given time, how could some of them be pushed further? How is all of this related to queer aesthetics, and why?

For extra fun, have them present more fully realized versions of the scenes next class!