

Ironic Detachment

(For any and all actors)

A monologue by William Missouri Downs

(An uncool writer is getting ready
for an audience talk back.)

WRITER

Most people associate ironic detachment with being intellectually profound. But ironic detachment is really just a pose, not significance. It's a tease, not thinking. Ironic detachment brings writers down to the level of Vogue and GQ magazine models who get paid to project disinterest while selling underwear and bras. Who in their right mind would want to have in-depth conversations with the persona that Vogue or GQ cover models project? And I may be wrong, because I don't speak from experience, but I'd be willing to bet that sex with ironically detached people, no matter how beautiful or handsome, is not very good.

Ironic detachment is a critical learned skill for writers because the one thing we don't want is to be labeled shallow. So, to cover the fact that all writers are human and humans are, most of the time, relatively shallow, it's best to go to the default setting of ironic detachment before anyone can peek under the hood and find that you and me and Hemingway and Joan Didion and whichever writer you want to plug in here are usually petty, confused, emotional messes that are scared of dying and haven't got the vaguest idea of what the hell this thing called life is about.

And oh, by the way, the younger generation has got ironic detachment down pat. They seem to say we should treat them as deeply suffering writers, not as teenagers. They want to be thought of as misunderstood and philosophically complicated instead of what they are: young, confused, sloppy thinkers who have brains that haven't fully clicked on. This is nothing new; in the 1950s, James Dean played ironic detachment better than anyone. Just think of all the underwear he could've sold if GQ had existed back then.

Now, if you don't mind, the audience is coming in, and I've got to make an entrance.

(The writer puts on sunglasses and
strikes a pose of ironic detached.
Now they are very cool.)