

Humorist Study

Analysis

The video *The CARDBOARD!* by Ryan Higa is a commercial advertising a piece of cardboard as a transportation device. The video begins with Ryan asserting the development of a new innovative piece of technology and shows several examples. He then subvert's the viewer's expectations in the following scene, where Ryan removes a hoverboard from a cardboard box, but then immediately throws it in the garbage in favor of the box itself.

From here, Ryan makes this seemingly useless product sound more appealing by inflating its ability with meaningless buzzwords. There is an instance of black humor when he makes the comment, "Don't you wish you could be on wheels all the time?" and then immediately cuts to a man in a wheelchair. Furthermore, Ryan emphasizes the absurdity of the matter when describing the customization options of the product. He talks about the many color options, which just end up being various shades of brown, then begins talking about "safety straps" which are just various wads of tape.

There is a brief moment where Ryan recognizes the absurdity of this concept but quickly brushes it off and reassures his audience of its superb function through a series of convoluted connections. Overall, the commercial is supposed to be an exaggerated parody of tech commercials from companies such as Apple, with Ryan acting in the role of Steve Jobs. It ends with the cardboard becoming a transformer, furthering the absurdity of this concept by proving that not only does it in fact work but had functions beyond simple transportation.

Zach Hadel's work in the show "Smiling Friends" incorporates similar levels of absurdity. In the episode, *Desmond's Big Day Out*, the character Pim, who is implied to be an adult, screams, "I love kids!" seemingly ignorant of the implication of his proud statement. His friend Charlie is taken aback, advising him against further exclamations. This is an instance of black humor and absurdism, as the audience is meant to find humor in Pim's blatant unawareness. The pair walk up to Desmond's room, who they assume to be a child in need of cheering up. The audience's expectations are then subverted when it is revealed that Desmond is, in fact, an adult man. He is pointing a gun toward his head, seemingly intending to end his own life. Desmond is very flippant about this, but Pim insists on trying to cheer him up.

While Zach Hadel's work in *Smiling Friends* possesses more elements of black humor than Ryan Higa's, both of them utilize elements of absurdity and subversion to engage their audiences. Ryan uses black humor more sparingly, while for Zach Hadel, it's very much the foundation of his comedy. In *The CARDBOARD!* Ryan is more focused on parody, while *Smiling Friends* is working off an original foundation and is more character-focused.

Reflection

For this specific project, I find myself being more inspired by Ryan Higa's brand of comedy. I plan on incorporating mainly absurdist techniques, as well as making the focus of my project more parody-oriented. If I decide to incorporate black humor into my project, I will take more inspiration from Zach Hadel's approach. His casual conversational delivery is more aligned with my sense of humor, so I think borrowing elements from his work will come more naturally to me.

I really enjoy that despite the absurd scenarios Zach places his characters in, they are still able to retain some level of self-awareness. In the specific work I analyzed from Ryan Higa, there aren't really any elements of self-awareness, but in his other works, he usually incorporates something like that. I think this inclusion adds a playful nod toward the audience and is definitely something I would consider including within my own project.

Ryan's way of composing his shots also lends well to his brand of humor in his video. The way each clip accompanies his narration in a way that not only visually represents it but also elevates the comedy is something I'm looking to incorporate. Overall, a lot of my comedic influences for this project come from peers, people who don't specialize in comedy specifically, or fictional characters (which are often an amalgamation of the efforts of multiple people).

With this in mind, it's difficult to pinpoint specific inspirations. However, for the kind of parody-driven comedy my partner and I plan on utilizing for this project, creators like Ryan Higa serve as a significant starting point. Most importantly, I plan on incorporating the same kind of exaggerated personalities both Ryan and Zach use to drive home their humor.

Works Cited

Hadel, Zach, director. *Desmond's Big Day Out*. *YouTube*, YouTube, 10 Apr. 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBJyNU_YlpY&ab_channel=AdultSwim. Accessed 8 May 2023.

Higa, Ryan, director. *The CARDBOARD!* *YouTube*, YouTube, 5 Sept. 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yt3VB-7juiY&ab_channel=nigahiga. Accessed 8 May 2023.

Project Pitch

1.) Are you collaborating with others?

Yes, Zeytin Ercan

2.) Which form of humor are you planning to develop? (See menu.)

We are planning to develop a satirical advertisement in the form of a comedic narrative.

3.) What is the subject (or, in the case of satire, the target)? Why did you choose this subject?

The subject of our project will be 90s style infomercials. We chose this subject because a lot of times, as-seen-on-TV style products are not particularly useful or necessary, so we wanted to play on that by making a fake advertisement for a product that is quite literally useless.

4.) Which comedic tools/techniques do you plan to use, and why? (List at least 3 main ones and explain briefly how you plan to use them):

- Absurdism: the entire concept of the product is absurd, as napkins being sewn to pants defeats the purpose of using a napkin in the first place
- Exaggerism: we will use exaggerated language as well as exaggerated and somewhat corny 90s style editing
- Parody: the style of our fake advertisement will parody advertising TV personalities such as Phil Swift and Billy Mays

5.) Why do you think this is the right humor project for you? (If you have a group, can you assure me that everyone is invested in this idea and you won't have trouble getting everyone to contribute meaningfully?) What makes you excited about this idea? What are some potential pitfalls you wish to avoid?

I'm excited for this project because I think that our concept has a lot of room for improv and overblown acting, which I think will be really fun. I think that being able to use editing to enhance the humor will also be really fun and less stressful than producing a live skit or stand up routine. Emma and I have worked together on a past comedic short narrative project in animation, so I am confident in our teamwork abilities and believe that we will both put in as much effort as possible into creating a project we're proud of. The major pitfall I want to avoid is procrastinating the work, specifically on editing, because I think it will take away from the final product, but as our work for other classes is slowing down, I'm confident that Emma and I will be able to regulate our time responsibly.

6.) If you get approval, what's your next step?

Once we get this idea approved we will start acquiring the necessary props, script writing, and making arrangements to film