

Humorist Study

(Analysis/Reflection + Project Proposal)

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I. Analysis

James Acaster is a standup comedian who tells **anecdotes**. His storytelling often branches off into tangents about specific details. His body movements are very involved in the story. [One of his bits performed at the Apollo](#) is about couples giving each other massages. In it, he pretends to turn off and on a light, get into bed by holding an imaginary blanket, and give a massage. He lets the audience watch the massage move for a while before speaking.

In contrast, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy use **slapstick** primarily. Their film, "[The Music Box](#)", is about their struggle to move a piano up a long staircase with continuous challenges coming their way. They're masters of slapstick and exaggerate noises to emphasize the impact of hits and blows. This can be seen and heard when they loudly proclaim "OH" as a police officer pokes them with a baton. They also play **caricatures** of their characters that have personalities that are easy for the audience to grasp. Immediately, when you see each of them move, you can tell exactly the type of characters they are. Hardy acts as the brains of the operation, but the audience can quickly tell he isn't any smarter than Laurel. He's a character that wants to feel important and high class. Laurel is more of a comedic relief with his lean stature and absent smile. Sometimes, the audience is pushed to believe Laurel may just be a little smarter than Hardy before remembering neither are wise. He easily gets wrapped up in Hardy's plans. The two make a great duo, playing off one another. They try to solve problems but end up making situations worse than before. Their chemistry is the heart of the show. The shorts pose very clear problems and attempts for solutions. The punchline is a major failure of their attempts, a **blunder**, like the piano getting destroyed by an angry and pompous man at the incorrect apartment.

Both Mr. Acaster and Laurel & Hardy use self deprecating humor and their exaggerated body language can carry the story itself. Although Mr. Acaster does stand up while Laurel & Hardy is prerecorded films, they target relatable experiences for the audience. You can always tell what they're thinking or feeling based on their faces and body language. Acaster has to exaggerate his facial expressions since he performs on stage for an audience sitting far away. Laurel and Hardy do the strong expressions to emphasize their characters and key moments. Both actors will also allow a moment of silence to make the audience pay more attention to their action before speaking up or having an explosion of noise. This creates contrast between moments and the extreme moments all the funnier. An audience will also sometimes chuckle at the long, quiet pauses.

I. Reflection

For my own project, I'd like to incorporate standup and slapstick. I grew up watching classics like Tom and Jerry, Warner Brothers' Looney Tunes, and Laurel & Hardy. Their shorts and films had me in stitches. As I got older, I grew to appreciate comedy through storytelling and subtly more. I still find the moments of comedic and dramatic accidents funny now. There's modern day shows, like *What We Do In the Shadows* and *Our Flag Means Death*, that still use slapstick and stunts. I decided for this project to study the work of Laurel and Hardy because their films are timeless and help me understand the fundamentals of slapstick comedy.

James Acaster is a more recent inspiration. I learned about him in his Netflix series, *Repertoire*. His rotten banana story was the first joke I found particularly funny. I saw him before as a participant in Britain's *Taskmaster*, but didn't know much about him at the time. I'm happy I took the time to learn more about his content because I want to incorporate his storytelling style into my own humor project.

I'm using James Acaster as inspiration for the standup portion because of how involved his body language is in retelling a story and the expressions he does. I've noticed he also puts thought into having his outfits match the set he performs on.

Blending James Acaster wit and the physical humor of Laurel and Hardy would be a nice way to tie my sense of humor throughout my life.

I've enjoyed video editing for a long time now, since 5th grade, and see it as a powerful tool to emphasize punchlines and timing. I'd like to expand my editing skills to a more humor based project through the clips of my character performing stunts. I have a greenscreen at home I can use to put myself in different places. I've noticed that in some Laurel and Hardy shorts, they use a greenscreen for things like a busy street when driving in a car. However, they still interact with physical props. I want to maintain a level of authenticity myself by still using props in my own clips.

I'll use James Acaster as an influence for the standup portion of my act. His onstage delivery and acting would be great for effectively sharing a story. The inspiration behind the character I'll play will be Oliver Hardy for his ego and pride in the shorts.

Works Cited

Cellania, Miss. "Oliver Hardy: The Fat One." *Neatorama*, Neatorama, 23 Jan. 2014, <https://www.neatorama.com/2014/01/23/Oliver-Hardy-The-Fat-One/>.

"James Acaster Live at the Apollo." *YouTube*, ArseRaptor, 15 Dec. 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89E_zW1qIM8. Accessed 30 Mar. 2022.

Parrott, James, director. *THE MUSIC BOX - Laurel and Hardy*. *YouTube*, Pham Xuan Phuong, 4 Dec. 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOSHfJohUN0>. Accessed 30 Mar. 2022.

II. Description of Proposed Project

Provide a detailed description of your project, including what you intend to develop (the form of humor, topic/content, techniques you plan to use, how many people you'll need to deliver the performance, visual aids/props, time, and any other details that will help to give me a picture of what you're planning to create. *This section is worth 25% of the grade for this assignment.*

1.) Are you collaborating with others? Yes* or No

No

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

Sketch comedy with mix of video editing.

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

In movies, there's stunt doubles to perform the extreme actions of actors. My character would be a seasoned stunt double giving a presentation to the class (the audience). I'll use a Google Slides presentation for the lesson. In the lesson, the character is boasting and proud of the work they describe as proud, when in reality, the tricks they show on the slides are very tame.

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):

Slapstick is essentially for the Stunt Double, even if it's tame at times. I want to use physical humor and really focus on the timing of actions.

Caricature of this retired "professional", where their main personality trait is their pride.

Anecdotes of their time on sets and the story behind the stunts they've performed.

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 think people find the way I can make a character movie funny. I love animating and have an idea of how to time things for laughs. When I was brainstorming, I was split between a live performance or editing a video. This project would be a blend of both worlds.

A challenge for my act is finding a climax and making sure the performance doesn't feel stagnant.

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

I'd develop the type of gags I could pull off in the videos and ideas for hypothetical (or real) movies my character performed in.

Doesn't he look like how I smile

