Humor Project Proposal

Overview:

Your humor proposal contains two essential parts: 1.) a 2-page study of two humorists of your choice; 2.) a description of your project for teacher approval. *Both parts of the Proposal assignment must be fully completed by the due date listed on the calendar in order to avoid late penalties.*

Part 1 – The Humorist Study (2 pages)

An important cornerstone of your Humor project is the study of two professional humorists who have done work that inspires you to make comedy of your own. Compare and contrast their subject matter / themes and styles, using terms from the Comedy Toolbox, in a 1-page, single-spaced analysis. Then, in another 1-page, single-spaced page, reflect on which subjects/themes and techniques you find most inspirational and valuable in considering your own project. You may opt to include outside research to supplement each of these sections, especially if you are interested in connecting which comedians influenced their work or criticism/reviews. You will need to include a Works Cited for all sources used in your study section. *This section is worth 75% of the grade for this assignment.*

Write your 2-page study here:

When I think of "dysfunction", I think of comedians Bo Burnham and Brandon Rogers.

Both comedians' careers started on Youtube but branched out differently. Burnham is a former stand-up and musical comedian turned writer and director whereas Rogers creates comedy sketches and series for YouTube and other internet platforms. Although their comedic mediums are different, their content is pretty similar.

In terms of comedic techniques, Burnham utilizes more of the verbal comedic techniques, including verbal irony, anecdotes, and shifting points of view while Rogers incorporates more physical and situational comedy, such as slapstick and practical jokes. Ultimately, both use their respective techniques to create absurd humor. Additionally, both heavily utilize blue humor, black humor, and repartee. A big similarity between them is the usage of caricatures, though the way they use it are different. Because Burnham does stand-up, the caricature seems more lifelike and as if Burnham *is* that caricature. Burnham tends to caricature for satirical purposes, such as the teenage heartthrob character in his song "Repeat Stuff" or the arrogant jerk he portrays in his stand-up. On the other hand, Rogers' caricatures are characters that are *separate* from him. His caricatures go beyond the exaggerated behavior into over-the-top looks, like a gaudy golden crown, powdered wig, and white-painted face for his British character. Unlike Burnham, Rogers' caricatures aim to simply be funny and offensive instead of criticizing. Although, Rogers may sometimes use it as satire, but the criticism is more subtle than Burnham's.

Despite the differences, there is some overlap between the comedians' caricatures. For one, both caricatures aim to make fun of someone, whether it be a successful yet uninspiring country artist or a neurotic office worker. With that in mind, both bring attention to the darker and often overlooked aspects of human beings. For instance, in "I F--k Sl--ts", Burnham performs a poem with a lot of misogynistic language as commentary on toxic masculinity and its tendency to irrationally lash out over distressing situations like heartbreak. In Rogers' "Concerned Mother" sketch, his caricature of the single mom demonstrates the stress that comes with the role and how this desperation to keep it all together can lead to a dysfunctional family.

On that note of dysfunction, as mentioned earlier, this seems to be a common theme. While Burnham's comedy mainly comments on social issues, especially within the entertainment industry ("Kill Yourself", "From God's Perspective", "Sad"), Rogers' comedy focuses more on interpersonal relationships ("Angry Office (OFFENSIVE)", "The Nuclear Family (OFFENSIVE)", *Stuff & Sam!* series). Essentially, Burnham is more "macro" while Rogers is more "micro". Both, however, do tend to create content based on a person's inner turmoil and repressed, often undesirable aspects of their self– their Jungian "id" or "shadow". Rogers cast of characters are full of angry and insane individuals (ex. Helen the Hall Monitor and her drinking problem, Bryce Tankthrust the CEO who *literally* doesn't have a heart). Burnham, on the other had, focuses more on the depressed side of things ("Left Brain, Right Brain", "Can't Handle This Right Now"). Additionally, Rogers neurotic characters are mainly played for laughs but Burnham's content is more of constructive commentary on mental health. Both comedians create content based on people's problems and misfortunes, but Burnham tends to provide solutions (although normally with the long-form series, Rogers will somewhat do the same). Ergo, Rogers comedic tone tends to be more choleric than Burnham's reflective counterpart, though both have a touch of cynicism.

Another thematic similarity between the two is relationships. Burnham focuses more on romantic relationships ("Love is…", "Breakup Song", "Lower Your Expectations"), but Rogers explores different types of relationships with his characters, from familial relationships to teacher and student relationships. Both illustrate a lot of the negative aspects of relationships and explore how the neuroticism of at least one of the participants affect it. Burnham is a bit self-deprecating in that he mainly criticizes how toxic men can be in relationships, though Rogers has no problem exposing the flaws of both sexes.

In summary, Burnham is more of a critic while Rogers is more of a clown. However, they're both pretty filthy, ridiculous and insane to have written the comedic material that they've done. Regardless, I love them both and genuinely enjoy their humor, even if it makes me question my own.

For my own project, I was inspired by Burnham's and Rogers' ability to portray the often repressed aspects of the people that we know in real life in such a comedic way. Seeing rude and unlikeable characters, in a sense, provides a bit of relief as through these caricatures, we are able to explicitly experience the dark and annoying aspects of ourselves that we prefer to keep beneath the surface. There is something oddly captivating about the offensiveness and shock of these caricatures; we know it's wrong, but we choose to laugh at it anyways. To be honest, portraying the most unlikeable characters is fun for me. There's a relief in breaking out from the norm of politeness and being able to let go in the filthiest way. I think it's why a lot of people like "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia" so much. There is no real redeemable quality about any of the characters; they're all neurotic assholes with little to no character development whatsoever. However, we can't help but look away from the beautiful car crash that is that show. Additionally, by satirizing terrible people, I am able to healthily release my pent-up frustration over them. It sounds bad, but it's my way of complaining. For these reasons, I wanted to focus on character comedy and caricatures.

Additionally, I would like to use hyperboles and absurd humor for my project because I like making people uncomfortable and confused. I want to take others on a ride that they are viciously getting thrown off on, yet in a desperate attempt to see where it goes, they accept it and hold on. I want to make the jokes convoluted yet clever so people have to work hard to truly understand the jokes. I think that would be especially comedic with its juxtaposition of the seriousness of the character I would like to portray. Having the character appear composed in contrast with the absurd humor would be funny. It's like the Logician from *Rhinoceros*– what he's saying is absolute insanity, yet it's coming from this seemingly well-put together man that everyone respects.

In terms of subject manner, I want to satirize the behavior of peers in my age group because there is a lot to make fun of. More specifically, I want to satirize the art kids, as I am one myself and have been surrounded by them throughout my whole high school career. Basically, I wish to satirize the trope of the troubled artist, the type of person who believes that no one truly understand them and their art. Honestly, there are some people who will try to make their art seem deeper than it actually is. I, admittedly, have been this person in the past, (and may still be this person), especially with Ms. P's junior Conceptual project.

Additionally, I'm inspired by the arrogance in the art world. The Kurt Vonnegut quote (I can't find the direct source of the quote I was thinking of, but I think he said something like this

in *Breakfast of Champions*) about art being a conspiracy between artists and the rich to make poor people feel stupid sums up the phenomenon quite well. It's a trend in the art world that bothers me. I feel like modern art has become a bit ingenuine. It's as if anyone could draw a circle on a canvas and attach some vague meaning to it and it will sell for thousands of dollars. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate conceptual art, but I can't help but feel baffled when such art sells for thousands. I think what really bugs me is when these rich people will pretend they truly understand the art and scoff at those who don't; when they act intelligent and superior even though elevator music plays in their head. I understand there is no "correct" way to interact with and appreciate art, but I can't help but feel the attitude around art has been tainted. Seemingly, the art world has become less effortful and more vapid now that people care more about the art being a status symbol as opposed to genuinely appreciating the art.

I believe the same can be said about modern activism. There are many who will say they're "woke" or "activists", but the fact of the matter is, they don't even know much about the cause they so-call believe in. On the other hand, some try to shoehorn it in in places that don't seem necessary. For instance, many people and companies try to capitalize on this sort of activism to gain more customers (ex. J.K. Rowling retroactively labelling Dumbledore as gay or the Gillette for Men ad). I'm all for being politically involved and genuinely trying to fight for social progress, but it bothers me when it's all for show. I dislike the inauthenticity and desire to capitalize on important issues. It feels exploitative. Thus, I wish to provide commentary on this sort of vapid political correctness for my comedy project.

***

Part 2 – 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 performing. *This section is worth 25% of the grade for this assignment.*

1.) Are you working with a group? Yes* or No

> *If Yes, list your group members here (when I meet with you, I will also need a clear picture of who is doing what):*

2.) Which form of humor are you planning to develop? (See menu.) Will it be a LIVE or pre-recorded performance?

I want to perform live satire/a comedic narrative. Essentially, I want to do comedic poetry. The poem could potentially be formed in a way that creates a comedic narrative, which is why this is both a satire and comedic narrative. I also want to bring in some sort of chime or instrument to supplement my performance.

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

I want to create a beatnik persona that makes fun of that edgy, "woke" and faux deep personality. I chose it simply because I wanted to act like an asshole who thought they were more intelligent and "conscious" than others. I wish I had a more meaningful purpose for choosing this subject, but I honestly just like making fun of people.

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

Caricature: If I'm planning on crafting a persona, then it would probably be a good idea to make it into a caricature in order for it to appear comedic.

Satire: As I am making fun of a certain type of person.

Absurd humor: I think using absurd humor in a serious tone would really drive the point of my humor project across. The juxtaposition would prove to be comedic, kind of like the Logician in Rhinoceros.

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 about this idea because I've always wanted to do some sort of live performance, especially with comedy. I could do stand-up, but I honestly think I could do well performing a character. I'm basically a walking-talking block of irony, so I might as well use that to my advantage for this project. I mean, I only really believe this is the "right" humor project for me because it simply *feels* right. I'm excited to make others cringe and roll their eyes at me. It was really fun creating comedic poetry during the past few months, as I was trying to come up with material for a potential Zenith.

I wish to avoid having my character become too dry after a long period of time. I hope that the performance is able to carry itself throughout without staying one-note. Lastly, I hope my jokes are varied enough and that I'm not "beating a dead horse".

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

First, I will make sure to flesh out my beatnik persona. I'm thinking her name should be Arizona and she only eats rocks because she doesn't want to harm any living thing.

My next step is to either choose and revise a pre-existing poem or create an entirely new one. I think this just depends on how I want to go about this project. Do I want to create poetry that complements my character, or do I want to make the poem itself have comedic and meaningful substance? Basically, should I focus on satirizing or crafting a comedic narrative via poetry?