

The Humorist Study

I. Analysis

The two comedians in this study, Steve Martin and David Sedaris, use similar techniques yet have distinctly different styles of performance and presenting their subject matter. David Sedaris has a much drier delivery than Martin. He's not performing a stand-up routine, but instead reading an essay of his. He doesn't use nearly as much inflection in his voice, and much of the humor comes from the simple matter-of-factness in his reading. His essay itself is an anecdote that reads as a product review, filled with ironic off-hand remarks you might expect in an infomercial. The whole thing, however, is about a new product at the time called a Stadium Pal— a portable urinal kit often advertised for sporting events. In concept it seems so ridiculous that it may be hard to believe it's real. His essay capitalizes off of that feeling in the deadpan and straightforward delivery, as a great deal of it could easily be interpreted on paper as entirely serious. The essay is also full of blue humor, given the subject matter, and describes the disgusting qualities of the product alongside its intended benefits, with the same deadpan delivery to highlight how absurd the product is. The combination of facts and off-hand remarks is presented in a witty way, and much of the wit comes from the satirical nature of the essay. He pokes fun at society in general by sarcastically describing how many trivial corners we may feel it is important to cut without caring slightly about our dignity.

Steve Martin, on the other hand, performs a more appropriate routine that swings in a more lighthearted and goofy direction— as per the nature of stand-up comedy. The routine in question was near the start of Martin's career, and it clearly shows his style of approach that he developed over the years. He strays away from political subject matter or topical social commentary and instead focuses on lighter subjects. In this example he uses a lot of self-aware irony surrounding stand-up comics and situational humor with common everyday irritations. He takes these common nuisances, which could be seen as unspoken truths, and makes goofy caricatures out of them or exaggerated practical solutions— usually satirical in nature. But as a stand-up comic, he focuses on just trying to make people laugh in a time period of political frustration and anti-war movements. His humor is tacky and not necessarily anything new, but he simply commits to making people laugh.

Sedaris and Martin aren't very similar in style, but they do have a few techniques in common. They poke fun at both themselves and the world around them, and portray satirical scenarios highlighting the petty frustrations we all experience daily. Neither one of them sets out to make a bold statement, but rather to just address things we all know in a style that makes us laugh. And at the end of the day, despite their different approaches, they're committed to just making people laugh and enjoy themselves for a little portion of their day.

II. Reflection

I don't really watch comedy often. I've never been much of a fan of stand-up comedy or talk shows, and I've never watched TV at home (we don't even have cable). To be honest, I've never been much of a fan of comedy delivered in a very direct fashion— namely stand-up routines. It's probably the same reason that comedy movies structured around the humor rather than the plot (e.g. *Airplane* or *Spaceballs*) leave me feeling less satisfied than if it was vice versa: structured around the plot, interspersed with comedic moments. Direct comedy, to me, never feels quite deserving or earned. I don't mean to be pretentious; I'm just not a huge fan.

David Sedaris' essay is more my style of comedy. I'm a fan of deadpan and sarcastic humor, especially when it's structured around a consistent story and is satisfying in its build-up and payoff. When jokes or witticisms are made, it's more satisfying because the essay led up to it and it feels earned. With a stand-up routine, the performer often bounces around ideas and jumps to topics fairly quickly to make the audience laugh. Of course this isn't always true, but I think there's something about knowing the person onstage is trying to make me laugh that makes me not want to laugh. It's an open sea of subject matter and I never feel that enough effort was put into it. It gets repetitive to me as well— like the "Substitute Teacher" sketch, which is funny to me until it's dragged out and repeats the same joke over and over. Jokes in that style often feel very simplistic and bland, and I guess the goofy performances in stand-up routines and the like just aren't my style of humor.

Regardless of the exact reason, watching these made it clear to me that I much prefer a dry, sarcastic, and generally ironic presentation. When I make jokes or try to be funny, I aim to be satisfied in what I've written, which is one of the reasons I would far prefer writing a specific structured essay to a spontaneous performance jumping around different topics or ideas.

Comedy needs to be personal to satisfy me. I have to feel like what I'm saying is meaningful to me. When I say "meaningful", that doesn't necessarily have to imply that there's a message or takeaway from it; it just has to be something that I care about. That often means I would have to inject myself into it and become a part of whatever story I'm presenting. I always like to maintain a certain level of self-awareness and humility in any of my work. Sometimes I do this to a fault and it gets annoying, but I only ever feel any work I do is mine when my own voice is a part of it. I feel like I use deadpan self-aware or self-deprecating humor to an obnoxious degree in my reflections or writing— especially so on my website. I am *too* honest about how much effort I put into anything (especially my weekly photos). I might as well channel that kind of energy into the project itself (very meta).

Anyway, this research just solidified the kind of humor I enjoy and like creating, and set in stone that what I will be doing will incorporate dry or deadpan delivery, sarcastic subject matter, potentially satirical subject matter, a sense of self-awareness, and will read as an essay rather than a sketch or routine.

Works Cited

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Description of Proposed Project

1.) Are you collaborating with others?

a.) Nope.

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

a.) My plan is to do a weird existentialist comedic essay.

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

a.) The subject of this weird existentialist comedic essay is basically answering the question of “What do people do?” Because it’s a weird question that sends you down a strange path of questioning purpose and existence.

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):

- a.) Unspoken truths— to examine human behaviors and raise the unspoken truths of how overall useless our actions tend to be
- b.) Verbal irony— in describing this harsh reality in a blunt and sarcastic way that clearly showcases the flawed viewpoint
- c.) Diffusing anxiety— taking the existentialist and nihilistic view that nothing matters, and using that scary feeling as tension relief instead

5.) Why do you think this is the right humor project for you? What makes you excited about this idea? What are some potential pitfalls you wish to avoid?

a.) As I said in my humorist study, I much prefer the approach of writing an essay with dry comedy, so this is probably the best way to approach this. The idea is also something that I’ve kind of wondered in the past, and existentialism and dumb philosophical questions have always fascinated me and made me want to go deeper into it, to a degree that it eventually becomes pointless. Plus, I really like existentialism and nihilism. Pitfalls I hope to avoid are mostly in the writing process, and in finding motivation and satisfaction in what I create— hopefully having an idea im interested in will help with that, but given the

current state of things and the severe mental toll it's taken on me, I'm going to have to just cross my fingers for some of it.

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

a.) I suppose I'll be writing the script for this next.