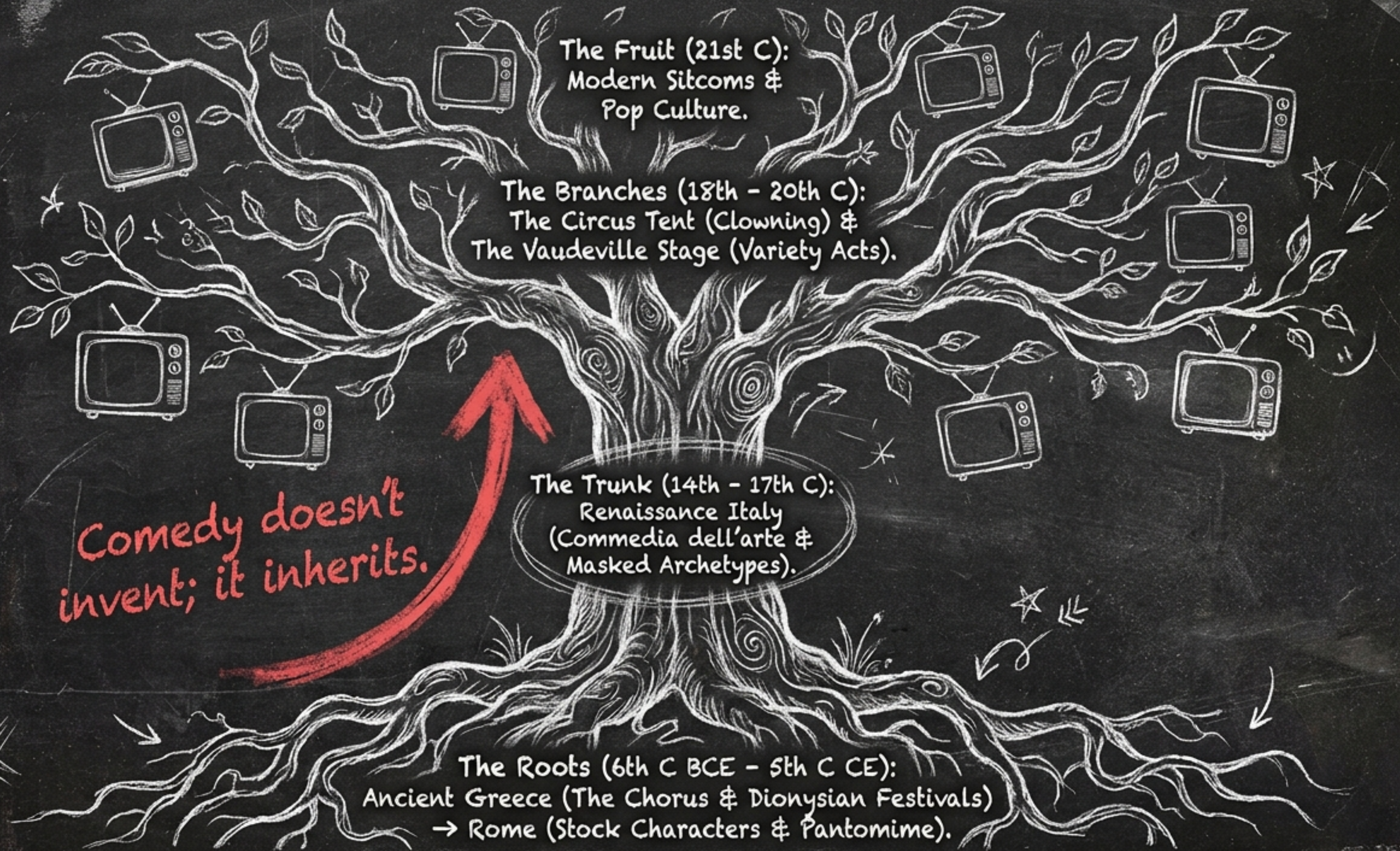


The Genealogy of Jokes



Tracing the DNA of physical comedy from 16th-century Italy to modern pop culture.





Era: Solidified in the 1550s,
peaked in the 1650s.

Origin: Italy.

The Catalyst: Born as a
rebellious street-theatre
response to the tight controls
of the Catholic Church.

No scripts.
No rules.
Just archetypes
and attitude.



Scenarios
(Loose story
outlines built
on love, money,
or food)



Stock
Characters
(Archetypes
that never
change or
learn)



Masks
(Physical
personas)



Lazzi
(Short,
physical
comedic
gags)

The
Commedia
Formula

(Improvised,
highly physical
street theatre)

The plot changes.
The characters never do.

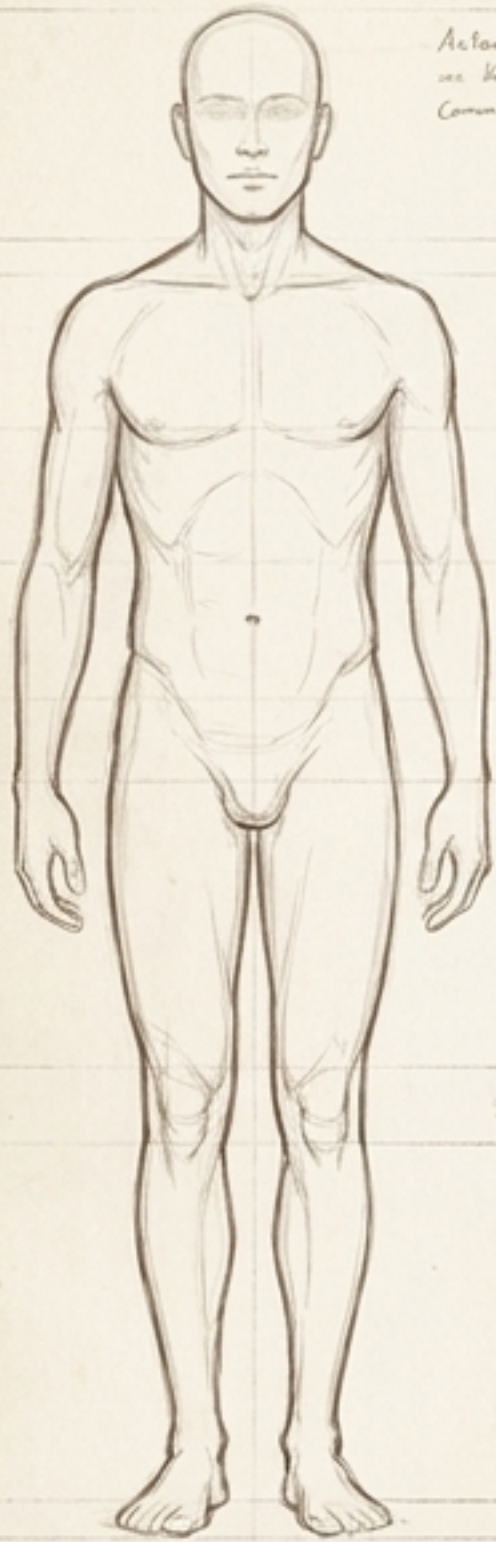
The Servants /
Zanni
(Arlecchino,
Columbina).
Low status,
powerless, but
incredibly clever
and pulling all
the strings.



*True comedy punches up.
The 'powerless' always
outsmart the powerful.*



The Masters
(Pantalone, Dottore,
Capitano). High
status, high wealth,
but utter fools.



Actors immerse roles
as characters into the
Commedia dell'arte.



Anatomical world

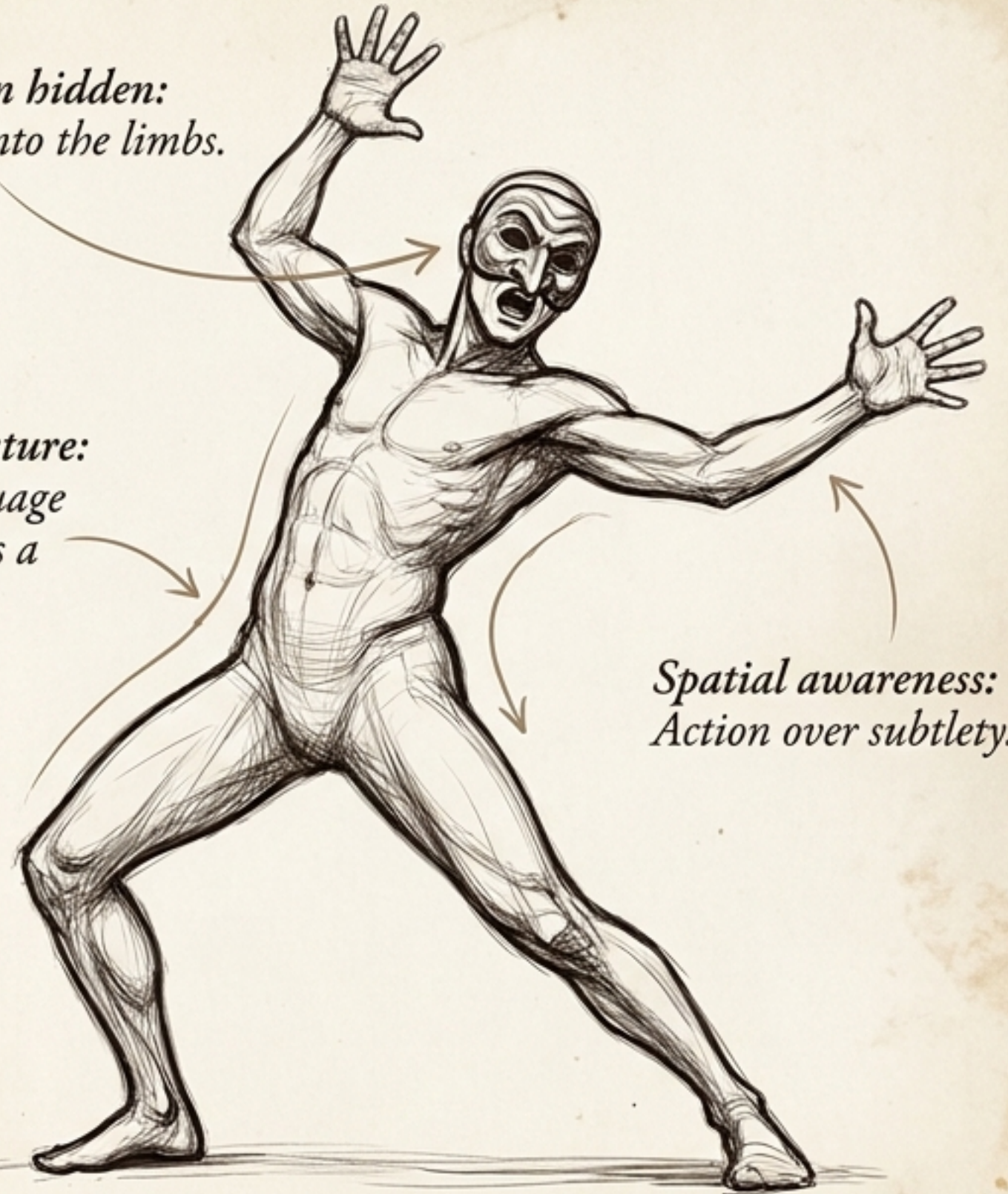
poetry
into figure

represented

The later
figure
for sculpture

*Facial expression hidden:
Forces emotion into the limbs.*

*Exaggerated posture:
Clear body language
reads from across a
noisy piazza.*



*Spatial awareness:
Action over subtlety.*

The mask is not a prop. The mask defines the character.

LAZZO: The Running Gag (Flowchart)

Step 1: The Setup



Character A crosses the stage with a suitcase.
Dialogue: "I'm taking my case to court."

Step 2: The Repetition



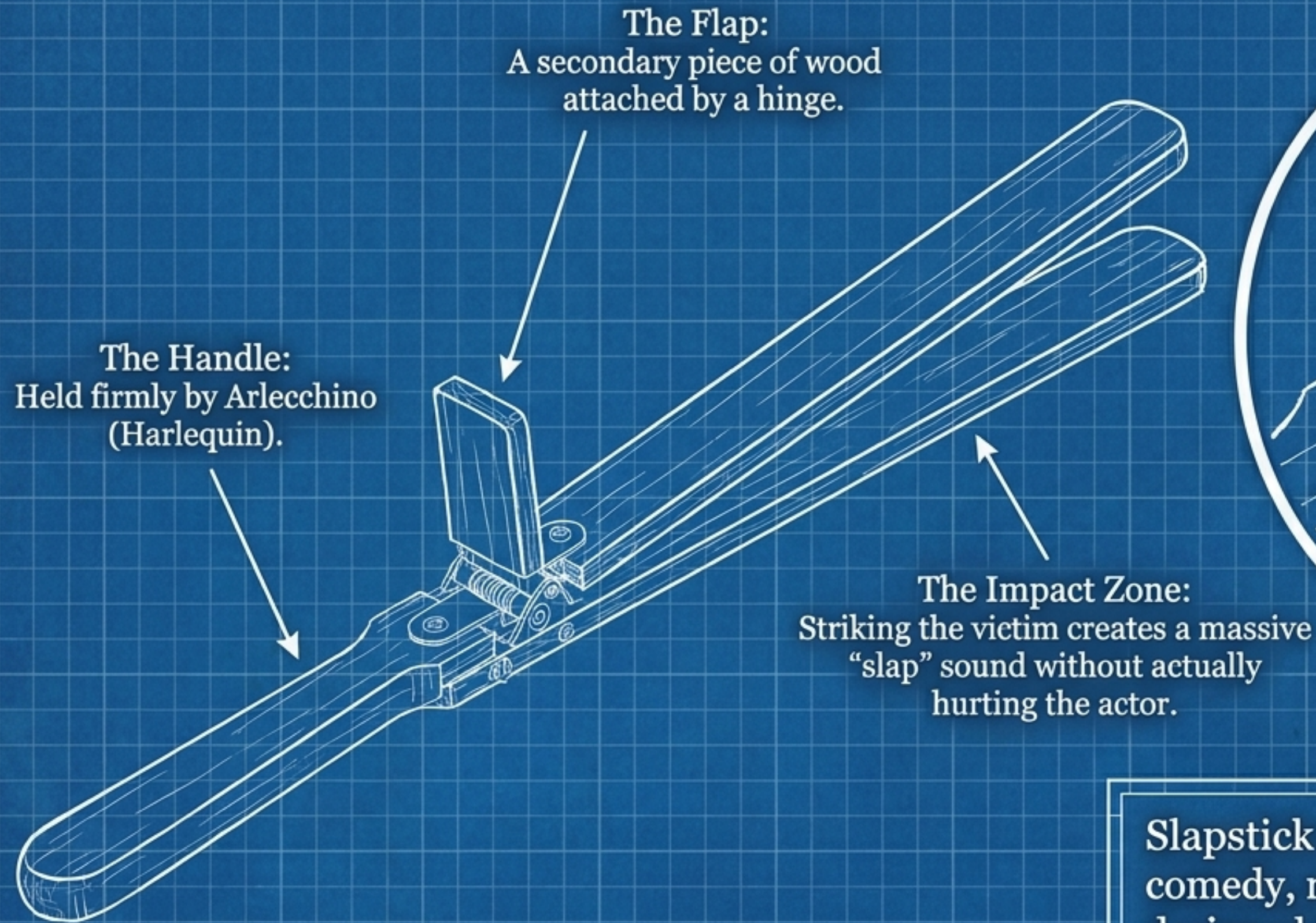
Character A crosses again, now carrying a ladder.

Step 3: The Punchline



Dialogue: "I'm taking my case to a higher court."

A 'Lazzo' is a running gag. It builds impact purely through repetition.



Slapstick (Noun): Knockabout physical comedy, named after the 16th-century bat designed to create illusionary violence.

The Circus

Est. 1768 by Philip Astley.
Added the Commedia "clown" to
fill the gaps between acrobats and
trick riders in the circular yard.

Vaudeville

1880s - 1930s

The great American variety show.
13 acts per bill, 6-15 minutes each.
Accessible to both wealthy box-seat
patrons and working-class stalls.

New venues, same DNA.
The clowns and physical gags simply
moved into tents and variety halls.



The White-face

Ancestor: Pierrot (Commedia).

Status: High intelligence, the "straight" ringleader.

Look: White grease paint (flour origins) to be seen from afar.



The Auguste

Ancestor: Zanni.

Status: Zany, lowest intelligence, ruins the tricks.

Look: Flesh-tone base, mismatched oversized clothes, red nose (Fratellini).



The Character / Tramp

Ancestor: American Vaudeville creation.

Status: Down-on-his-luck.

Look: Tattered hat, unshaven face (e.g., Charlie Chaplin).



Zanni
(Naive, optimistic fool)



SpongeBob
SquarePants



Pantalone
(Arrogant, tormented by fools)



Pantalone
(Know witty fool)



Squidward / Captain
Raymond Holt



Il Dottore
(Know-it-all with
extreme reactions)



Squidward /
Captain Raymond Holt



Dwight Schrute



Heroic Lover
(Dashing, witty banter)



Heroic Lover
(Dashing, witty)



Westley
(The Princess Bride)

We never stopped watching Commedia dell'arte.



The stage has evolved from
the cobblestones of a piazza
to the pixels of a streaming
platform. But the archetypes
remain universal.

The costumes change. The jokes survive.