



Transgressions in Absurd Comedy Movies --From Realism to Self-Reflexive Exploration

Yunge Zhu

Lanzhou Univ, Sch Chinese Languages & Literatures, Lanzhou 730000, Gansu, Peoples R
China

1764676953@qq.com

Abstract. "Transgression" is a very rich theory in sociology, and it has its unique reflection in movies as well. "Dystopia" is an important literary phenomenon that runs through the main trend of Western literature from the middle of the 19th century to the 20th century, and at the same time, it is a modern aesthetic category. It is also a modern aesthetic category. Digging deeper into the definition of absurdity and transgression, they both represent groups that are different from the public to a certain extent. Absurd comedy movies have unique "transgression" embodiment in character image, role modeling and behaviors, and this paper will explore the expression and aesthetic significance of transgressive behaviors in absurd comedy movies in depth.

Keywords: Comedy of the absurd; Transgressive behavior; Labeling; Representation.

1 Introduction

Absurdity, originally a term describing the violation of the rules of logic. As a philosophical concept, it mostly refers to the meaningless and antagonistic state of life. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger suggests that human existence is confronted with an absurd world, and as a result, one develops an endless sense of emptiness, loneliness and fear.^[1] In the dystopian world, human free will and choice become meaningless, but transgressive behavior reflects the individual's pursuit of freedom and rights. It can be seen that dystopia and transgressive behavior are a state of relative opposition. Absurd comedy film integrates absurdity and transgression with each other, and shapes the marginalized people and the "other people", and the image is representing and counter-representing and de-labeling at the same time.

2 The Construction of Dystopian Regional Space under Realism

The narrative space of the movie is not only the physical space, but also carries the cultural narrative function of the movie, and the people living in the space are closely related to the space, focusing on and caring for all the empirical phenomena and individual survival problems in the space. The French philosopher Lefebvre pointed out that space is not the established way of existence of the material world, but the product of social history, the production and reproduction of social relations "We have to turn the 'goal' of attention from the object of space to the actual production process of space itself."^[2], and in the movie social relations are the re-creation and reproduction of the characters' relations with each other in the space, compared with the purely physical space, the focus should be put on the characters in the space and the cultural connotation behind them.

Absurd comedy movie is different from traditional comedy, which presents the tragic core in a comedic way, showing the powerlessness to the real society after resistance. In the process of the protagonist doing resistance, the absurd comedy movie creates a world of sadness and joy with dysfunctional and illogical scenarios. In order to make the narrative achieve the desired effect, the director often sets up a closed space to inspire the protagonist to produce transgressive behavior. The scene of the movie *The Killing* is set in a closed town of longevity, where established rules have been formed over the years, and a series of transgressive behaviors by Niu Jieshi, such as "bullying men and women", "digging up the graves of extinct families", and "spreading oxycodone", no longer exist. A series of transgressions by Niu Jieshi on "bullying men and women", "digging up the graves of the families", and "spreading oxycodone" are no longer purely personal choices, but are influenced by the closed space of the town. The townspeople take for granted that the rules of the town are the truth that cannot be resisted, and the rules of the town and the townspeople who are being regulated inspire the creation of Niu Lumpy's transgressive behavior. As a relatively closed geographical space, Longevity Town involves relatively simple social relations, and because it has a relatively unified social order, it makes people with transgressive behaviors especially obvious in the space. The confrontation between the rule-abiding majority and the transgressing minority highlights the viciousness of human nature and the dark side of society. The scene in *A Good Show* is an isolated island. Originally, the world outside the island was a world with established social rules and systems, but the sudden capsizing of the boat during the group-building process has left the people stranded on the island, where resources and opportunities are limited, and all people are at the same starting point in the new social environment, where the organizational relationships and rights mechanisms need to be re-established. In the process of rebuilding the social system, the characters in the space produce a series of anti-social transgressive behaviors, which become the point of view of the absurd comedy movie. The mountain village in *Forgetful Village* and the mental hospital in *Hello, Crazy!* and the psychiatric hospital in *Hello, Madman!* have all been chosen as relatively independent environments, and the space, provides the environment for the production of transgressive behaviors.

The construction of dystopian territorial space provides a context for the occurrence of transgressive behavior, on the contrary, transgressive behavior promotes the construction of dystopian territorial space, and the two of them influence each other. In *Crazy Stone*, in order to compete for a valuable gemstone, the protagonists adopt a series of abnormal behaviors such as stealing, chasing, and swindling, which trigger a series of conflicts and contradictions and promote the development of the narrative. At the beginning of the film, the film starts with the cable car and the large angle inclined road, using the particularity of the space to create accidents, twisting the characters on the four narrative lines into each other, and deconstructing the urban space into a world full of chaos and disorder, and the multiple scenes in the film are endowed with absurd colors, and a "crazy" world is presented due to their transgressive behaviors. The multiple scenes in the movie are given an absurd color, presenting a "crazy" world through their transgressive behavior. The transgressive behavior further shapes the dystopian space by changing the relationship between the characters and the scenes. Whether it is a narrow underground tunnel, a busy street or a dilapidated building, these ordinary rooms become full of drama and absurdity under the impetus of transgressive behavior.

3 Behavioral Representation of the "Other" in Alienated Space

In the dystopian social space, group norms are set according to social groups, and those behaviors that do not conform to the social norms become "transgressions", and through the implementation and enforcement of the norms, the "transgressors" are labeled as outsiders.^[3]These outsiders include the marginalized, the eccentric, or the subversive, whose behavior is seen as deviant or even as a threat to the social order. In his discussion of transgression, Becker has said that whether or not a person who has transgressed will have a reputation for transgression depends very often not on the behavior itself, but on the norm enforcer. In absurdist comedy films, the determination of transgressive behavior is governed by both the norm enforcer and the transgressor.

3.1 Norms, Interaction and Power: Norm Enforcers in the Comedy of the Absurd

Absurd comedy films are different from traditional comedies in that they focus the camera on the bottom of the society, focusing on the thoughts, ideas and feelings of small individuals, and depicting the absurdity and distortion of the social environment in which individuals live as well as the alienation of social relations. Individuals in this type of movie are often not in tune with their social groups, and there is a relationship between disciplining and being disciplined, dominating and being dominated, and judging and being judged among them. The group that dominates, judges, and disciplines becomes the enforcer of norms. William Faulkner, in *My Last Days*, says "Sometimes I am not quite sure who has the right to judge whether a man is mad or not. Sometimes I think that pure madness or pure sanity is only as good as people are inclined to think it is. It's like it doesn't matter what a person does, it's how the majority of people

perceive their behavior." [3]It also suggests that people labeled as transgressive are not necessarily transgressive, which depends in part on the norm enforcer.

This is also true in absurdist comedies, such as the movie "A Good Day to Die Hard", where King becomes a norm enforcer after being stranded on a desert island and is followed by most people because of the survival skills he possesses. Anyone who goes against him is punished and similarly labeled as a transgressor. Zhang becomes the transgressor of this group, and because of the others' disapproval of Xiao Wang, a commercial civilized society is formed with Zhang as the center of power, who controls the ship's supplies with the intention of enslaving this group of ignorant people; at this point Zhang's group becomes the norm enforcers, and Ma Jin's disobedience becomes transgressive. When Xiao Wang informs the crowd of the arrival of the ship, most of the people do not believe in this fact and see Xiao Wang's behavior as madness. Thus, in the process of enforcing the norm by the norm enforcer, the norm enforcer who contradicts the norm enforcer regardless of the correctness of his behavior is labeled as transgressive by the norm enforcer. It is in this sense that transgression exists as a label, not as an intrinsic property of a thing. In fact, Xiao Wang in *A Good Show* can be seen as both absurd and transgressive. There is a very close relationship between absurdity and transgression. Due to the difference in their definitions, absurdity can be regarded as transgression, but transgression is not necessarily absurdity. Minority groups are seen as transgressive as long as they go against the dominant group, absurd refers to the violation of logical rules, which exist, and transgressive is only dominated by the rules of the mass group, which are not necessarily in accordance with the rules of logic.

Transgression as an important topic in sociology follows three research paradigms: the structural-functional paradigm, the social conflict paradigm, and the symbolic interaction model, and it is the symbolic interaction paradigm that Howard Becker uses as a theoretical basis to study transgression as a labeled existence. Symbolic interactionism can be traced back as far as the Chicago School sociologist Thomas's theory of situational definition: "If certain situations are held to be true, as a result they become true"^[4]. In other words, the truth of a situation creates the truth of a fact. Xiao Wang later found the boat is true, but Ma Jin in order to stay on the island to continue his utopia and fantasy dream identified Xiao Wang crazy, the people also do not believe that there are people outside the deserted island to save their own, in this situation, Ma Jin is more likely to get the support of the people, Xiao Wang is regarded as a crazy person by the group of people. This shows the power of labeling by norm enforcers.

3.2 Misconduct, Control and Resolution: Transgressors in the Comedy of the Absurd

Most of the characters in absurd comedy movies are set up as underclass characters, who do not have the power to dominate the times, and likewise do not have the ability to rebel against the times, and they are mostly the injured of the times. In order to achieve the director's narrative purpose, the characters at the bottom challenge the existing social order for various reasons and try to break the established rules and order. For example, Niu Jiezi in *The Killing of a Human Being*, Lazhouzi in *A Spoon*, and the bandits in *The Man with No Name*, etc. They try to interact with the mainstream

society in a benign way, but because they are labeled as transgressors and are unable to form a benign social relationship, they can only rebel against the society with transgressive behaviors that are not approved by the enforcers of norms, and carry out their activities in a way that the mainstream of the society defines as "misbehavior". deviant" by the mainstream of society. Sociologists Merton and Turgot have both studied the theory of deviance, in terms of the emergence of deviant behaviors, which are externally motivated (social conditions) - pressure-generated (psychological states) - transgressive behaviors. Niu Jiezhong lives in the ideologically solidified town of Changshou in *The Killing of a Life*. Forced by such social conditions, he then generates great psychological pressure to rebel against society, so Niu Jiezhong commits violent acts against others and does no evil. Based on the characters' long term tense - dysfunctional mentality in the movie, it only needs a pressure push to make them produce transgressive behavior.

For the Chicago School, they are most concerned with transgressive groups, and they emphasize the maintenance of social order and control, as well as the interaction between the individual and the social structure, and believe that transgressive behavior is actually a normal reaction to the dominant culture's control. The labeling perspective closely links social control and transgression: most of the transgressors in absurd comedy movies are the lower class characters abandoned by the mainstream society, and because most of the transgressions are only temporary, they are called "primary transgressions", and at this time they have been labeled as such, and the lower class characters are in the predicament of not being able to rebel against the mainstream society, and they can only go along with the society. At this point, they have been labeled as "primary transgressors", and the characters at the bottom are in a predicament where they cannot resist the mainstream society and can only conform to the society, accepting the label of transgression and acting in accordance with this pattern, thus becoming "secondary transgressors", and eventually this transgression becomes a habit and develops into a "habitual transgression", which is the dynamic process of becoming a transgressor. The bottom group in the absurd comedy film largely conforms to the mainstream group's classification of them, and eventually forms their own behavioral system. The purpose of transgression is actually to use resistance to solve problems. The protagonists in absurd comedy movies want to solve two types of problems: one is to find self-worth, change their own defects, and solve their own problems on the personal level, and the other is to think about the underlying reality of society on the social level. Once they encounter problems in solving their problems, transgressive behavior becomes the main character's choice. Glasses and Big Head in *The Man with No Name*, as underclass characters, want to solve the problem of poverty, and the movie begins with a robbery scene, but the result is a failure.

4 The "Anti-representation" of the Subject of the Absurd Comedy Film

In absurd comedy films, the "other" as the subject is usually given the identity and label of the underclass characters, and in order to create conflicts, the process of de-labeling

is constantly stripped away from the underclass characters' conformity to the mainstream culture, thus presenting a state of anti-representation. This kind of counter-representation is not only reflected in the subject's behavior, but also in the narrative structure and thematic culture of the film.

4.1 Counter-representation of Identity and Labeling of Underclass Characters

Domestic absurdist comedy films since the 21st century have excelled in presenting perverse and paradoxical narratives using absurdist realism, and what these films have in common is a self-conscious sense of the underclass, portraying, for example, a series of socially marginalized figures such as Bao Shihong (*Crazy Stone*), Lajiangzi (*A Spoonful*), and Lao Zhao (*Falling Leaves, Returning to the Roots*), minor characters labeled as underclass, who would be equally viewed as vulnerable by the mainstream population. Faced with social pressure, these underclass characters subvert these labels through their struggle against their absurd fate, presenting a brand new identity. In exploring the relationship between discourse and power, Foucault emphasizes the anti-centered and anti-authoritarian stance "Because there are so many competing ideas, institutions, and discourses, no single universally recognized truth can emerge and dominate society. And in a way, the vital power can never fully control things because it always leads to resistance."^[5] In addition to Foucault, scholars and critics such as Fanon, Said, and Hooks have written about marginalized cultures or historical work, and for Hooks, it is the identity of the marginalized that equips them with a worldview of resistance.

How do the marginalized people portrayed in absurd comedy films enact their practice of resistance? In *Sherlock on the Plain*, Zhanyi and Shuha help Chaoying build a house together; Shuha is hit on the way to buy groceries for a worker, and Chaoying bears the medical expenses for hospitalization after the hit-and-run driver. When confronted with the police's unsuccessful efforts to help locate the murderer, Zhanyi and Chaoying take on the guise of Sherlock Holmes and Watson in their quest for the truth about a car accident case. But limited by their identities, they can only commit transgressions: when faced with the first suspect, the owner of a hardware store, Chaoying pretends to buy something, so Zhanyi sneaks off to the backyard to investigate; the second suspect is the owner of a van in the campus, and the duo is discovered by the security guards while searching for it, and mixes among the students in disguise; the third suspect finds the city's Mr. Fan, and disguises himself as a takeout boy while looking for evidence. The actions of Zhanyi and Chaoying are in a sense transgressive and groundbreaking, as they break with the traditional image of the migrant worker, taking on the persona of Sherlock of the plains to carry out their own practice of resistance, and ultimately catching the driver of the accident.

4.2 Narrative Structure and the Counter-Representation of Thematic Culture

In addition to characterization, the director of absurd comedy films often subverts tradition with a non-linear, fragmented approach to narrative structure, which helps to

convey the irrational, subconscious intuitive activities of the characters, so that the kernel of the narrative is directed from the characters' conflicts to the disconnection between the individual and society as well as to the individual's experience of absurdity. Absurd comedy movies often use the technique of anti-representation, that is, twisting or inverting conventional events in daily life through the inversion of the plot order in the narrative structure, so as to reveal the absurdity of mainstream culture. For example, *Crazy Stone* adopts a multi-primary structure, designing multiple story lines in a three-dimensional space, in which the cans incident, the car crash incident, and the emerald delivery incident all use flashbacks, which makes it jump out of the traditional single narrative mode, showing exaggerated comedy with madness.

The presentation of the sense of absurdity interacts benignly with the portrayal of the underclass characters, demonstrating social injustice and contradictions through their perspectives and experiences. The characters at the bottom are abandoned by the mainstream culture, and the value of their individual lives is often overlooked, thus revealing the nature of certain absurdities in social life and the ugliness of human nature, and exploring topics such as human nature, society, and philosophy that are concealed beneath the surface of daily life. In "A Spoon", the goodwill gesture of pulling strips is regarded as alien, reflecting the indifference of human nature in the real society; in "Bullfighting", the survival experience of Niu Er in the war expresses the pseudo-sublime thinking of human nature revealed by the war; in "Hello, Madman", the madhouse is a symbol of the melting pot of the society. When the main body of the dominant culture masters the right to speak, the marginalized can only be regarded as a kind of human being. when the marginalized can only be seen as transgressors, and the marginal culture is categorized as transgressive. Hooks sees from the historical, value and aesthetic view of cultural pluralism that everyone has the right to representation, and the marginalized people have to work even harder to grasp the initiative of self-representation, and their culture has to be respected to a certain extent even if it is not recognized by the mainstream culture.^[6]

5 Conclusion

The absurd comedy film successfully breaks the framework and narrative style of traditional film. Through the exploration of unique geographical space, character representation and counter-representation, we not only see the entertainment value of the film, but also its profound reflection and cultural criticism of the real world. The behavioral representations of the underclass characters in the film are not only the embodiment of transgressive behaviors, but also a challenge to and reflection on mainstream values. Combining the theories of transgressive sociology and the Chicago School, the "other" in the film refuses to be defined by a single label through de-labeling and behavioral resistance, and challenges the established social norms and values in their own way.

References

1. [German] Heidegger. Being and Time [M]. Translated by Chen Jiaying and Wang Qingjie. Beijing: life-reading-Xinzhi Sanlian Bookstore, 2014.
2. [French] Henri Lefebvre. The Production of Space [M]. Translated by Liu Huaiyu et al. Beijing: Commercial Press, 2022.
3. Howard Becker. Outsiders: a sociological study of transgression [M]. Translated by Zhang Moxue. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2011:10,8.
4. Wright J D. International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition) [M]. Oxford: Elsevier, 2015.
5. J. Danaher: Understanding Foucault [M]. Translated by Liu Jin. Tianjin: Baihua Literature and Art Publishing House, 2002:92.
6. Huang Chunyan. Resistance, Caring, Transposition - Belle Hooks and Her Culture of Transgression - Representations of Resistance [J]. Foreign Literature, 2010.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

