

Disruptive Nature of Comedian Comedy

Introduction

Comedy is a major form of entertainment in the world today. Comedians are considered the most appreciated and the most well-known celebrities in our society. Today, almost every television program runs a comedy series, some of which already have enough devoted fans. Stand-up comedies are also becoming increasingly popular among the modern population, which means that the stand-up comedians are gaining more popularity each day. Comedy films made merely for the sake of fun have won a number of major awards in Hollywood, which is quite an impressive achievement in the world of cinema. The increasing popularity of comedies in entertainment industry offers to focus on comedies in scientific studies. Among the least known and, thus, the most peculiar material for a research, are the so-called comedian comedies. Despite the tautology, the given kind of comedies seems to be the most essential part of the modern comedy world. In the recent past, comedian comedies have become very significant in entertainment. Despite the ease which the comedian comedies are taken by the spectators, there has recently been a serious concern about the message that comedian comedies send to the audience and the impact comedian comedies have on the population. The effect of comedians in comedian comedies to the narrative and plot of these comedies has become a major area of study for scholars in entertainment.

Historical Overview of Comedies

The origin of comedies can be traced in the ancient Greece. The history and development of comedies is not as complex as that of other types of arts; however, the information concerning the first comedies is not available yet. In manuscripts, comedies are mentioned by the Ancient Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle and

Plato. Aristotle mentions comedies by telling us that comedies initially took place in Sicyon and Megaris. Comedies were the amusement part making the Ancient Greek literary dramas (Krutnik, 2003). Comedies were encouraged by the various festivals that took place in various villages in Greece. The festival allowed the people with artistic skills to play various roles in entertaining villagers during the festivals. Besides the festivals, it was customary for young people to move along the villages with choruses that later constituted early comedies. Later on, comedies developed as a distinctly separate branch of drama. Unlike dramas, comedies were less expensive, involved fewer characters and focused on humoristic aspects (Beach, 2002). For example, Plato comedies addressed the political, social issues and other matters of extreme importance in Athens in a lighter way, which attracted more attention.

Comedy is a well-known name in the history of art. In Ancient Greece, comedies were initially to address jokingly the topical problems that affected their society. Comedies continued developing as part of western culture, involving more and more artists and creating writing literary works to further on turn the latter into comedies to set on the stage. Evolving at a rapid pace, comedies had their impact on the music played in musical theatre. Enhancing the entertainment nature of theatres, comedies played an important part in the development of the world culture. Like in the modern world, comedies in the early days addressed the most topical social problems in a humorous way. Irony and satire were the most widely used stylistic devices in the Ancient Greece to express people's ideas about the problems spoken about in comedies. As entertainment industry underwent transformations, comedies started to take new forms.

Comedy Films

Comedy film developed from conventional comedies. Unlike the other films that focus on rapidly developing plot or the conflict brewing between the characters of the movie, the comedy films are entirely focused on humour. Another main difference between a comedy and other kinds of films is that most comedy films are revolving around a certain individual comedian rather than a wide range of characters and issues (Beach, 2002). The trend to focus on a certain actor and leaving the other comedians stay in the shadow as stand up comedians does not mean, though, that the latter are neglected – further on any extra comedian player transforms to become a comedy film star. Most comedy film contains carefree stories aimed at amusing their audience and do not presuppose any deep context of the movie. However, some comedy films address important issues in society, such as politics and family, yet in a light and unpretentious manner. Comedy films take various forms, such as comedy of manners, parody, anarchic and black comedies. Apart from black comedy films, most other films usually have a happy end.

Comedy and Television

Comedies are a common component of most of our television channels. Television started featuring comedies as soon as the era of television began. For example, an early BBC program, *Starlight*, hosted comedians to entertain its audience in the distant 1939. However, it is necessary to mark that the first television comedies developed from comedies in radio (Beach, 2002). Comedians first broadcasted their shows in radio programs, later developing these radioshows into programmes for television after their comedies had gained wide popularity. Most of television comedies are focused on either a certain situation, or a particular personality, wherefrom the entire plot stems from.

Comedian Comedy

It is not easy to differentiate a comedian comedy from other forms of comedy films. However, a comedian comedy refers to a movie or show where a certain actor stars and where the entire plot is centred around the particular actor. A comedian comedy is also known for its disruptive nature (Krutnik, 2003) and the way they capture the narration and make the narrator refer to the same actor.

It is necessary to mark that, as a rule, a typical narrative or descriptive film aims at capturing a past event or a fictional issue with focus of giving the details of the narrative. For a narrative film to be successful, the focus should not be on an individual character but on the story at large. In fiction films, the characters are supposed to be viewed in context of the film rather than in the light of the characters' vision of the world. However, creating a detailed outline of each character's personal development and the plot peculiarities is usually challenging in a comedian comedy due to the specifics of the genre (Krutnik, 2003). Since the audience knows the actors in the comedian comedy well enough, the spectators are reluctant to accept any changes that might occur to a certain comic character, which means that the latter cannot be developed.

Presenting a comedian in comedian comedy is usually a challenge. Usually, there is a dilemma concerning the way in which a comedian or a well-recognized comedian team should represent certain comic character. There is a considerable tension between the comedian's known character and the comedian character in a linear narrative (Krutnik, 2003), which results in certain complexities in acting the comical part. There is also a dilemma on how to integrate the comedian in a linear narrative, taking into consideration that most comedies lack the linear structure and are known as disruptive and eccentric (Beach, 2002). Accommodating an actor in a

comedian comedy, therefore, implies the risk of implanting the abovementioned disruptiveness into the actor him-/herself. The conflict between the well-known counter-cultural behaviour of comedians and the social cultural behaviours of other characters is another feature that a comedian comedy possesses. The difference between the character of comedian as a performer in a comedian comedy and those of other characters result in a disruption of the actor's personality, which is the reason for serious concerns about the genre of comedian comedy.

Disruptive Nature of a Comedian Comedy

There is a supposition that in comedy films, an attempt to make use of the roles of a known comedian leads to disruption. The nature and credibility of this observation is puzzling. However, it is a well-known fact that inviting a well-known comedian in a mainstream narrative is not easy (Beach, 2002). Although there is a lack of evidence as for this issue, one could make an attempt to offer certain logical suppositions concerning the specifics of comedies. Some comedies gain the disruptive potential when they are focused on interpretation of classical fictional films. They pick the most typical features of a classical film for the comedy to ground on, e.g. the manner of structuring the characters. In addition, rhetoric and illusionism may be affected by use of a comedian (Krutnik, 2003). For instance, most classic films were structured more as a story rather than a discourse. Embedding this element into a typical comedy with the help of well-known comedian results in a challenge – the audience will not be able to associate the comedian with certain characters.

Disruptive Features of Comedian Comedy

Comedian comedies possess elements of extra-fictional features that make them disruptive. Extra-fictional features involve the elements that do not conform to

the classical fiction films. The extra-fictional features tend to interfere with the ability of a comedian comedy to portray fictional nature of classical films (Krutnik, 2003). The use of a comedian withdraws the fictional nature making the fiction to appear just like another comedy, which diminishes the artistic value of the classical film. Thus, comedian comedies have the most deplorable impact on the way the audience perceives the classical movie. Using a well-known comedian in a comedian comedy magnifies the extra-fictional features of the given classical movie, leading to its disruption (Beach, 2002). The first and the main contributor to extra-fictional features of comedian comedy is in fact the show business nature of comedies. As comedies acquired the commercial nature, keen focus on fiction was ignored.

The influence of show business on fiction in comedies must be addressed as well. In particular, influence of show business to film narration is to be considered in the most careful manner, for it has a potential for enhancing the disruptive nature of comedian comedies. The discussion of acting styles in films assumes that there is no presence of audience in a comedian comedy – the latter is merely a one-man-show (Krutnik, 2003). Meanwhile, in a classical comedy the presence of audience is always assumed since a comedian aims at entertaining the audience rather than creating a show for art's sake. When placed in comedian comedy, the actors are not able to take into account the presence of audience. The actual fiction in a film can only be possible when the performers assume that there is no audience; by assuming this, a smooth narrative would be possible.

The difference between a movie and a theatre performance is important when looking into the nature of disruption in comedian comedy. The difference between a theatre performance and a film is evident in many aspects of a movie, but most of all in acting. In theatre performance, the presence of audience has a great impact on

the way the performers act. In a movie, the presence of audience cannot be acknowledged. In theatre acting, actors direct their performance towards the audience to attract their attention and strike the public with the way they impersonate certain character or reprint the reality of the other world (Beach, 2002). This requires the audience to participate, even though implicitly. The opposite is, however, observed in film acting (Krutnik, 2003). The actors in a film are not aware of the presence of the audience, while the audience has no chance of participating in the performance.

It cannot be doubted that there is the lack of reciprocity between the actor and the audience in a movie. This lack of reciprocity, in fact, is assumed when depicting a fictional universe. Most movie actors are trained on how to adopt different characters as required by a film (Beach, 2002). This case, however, proves wrong when actors perform in a comedian comedy. The character impersonated by the comedian is applied to the character in the film, since the audience expects the comedian to assume the known character. Thus, it becomes hard for the comedian to represent a different character or another person, portraying the linear nature of a fictional narrative. In classical acting staged in classic theatres, performers were supposed to assume fictional nature of their characters, literally transforming into the people they played until the performance ended. For this reason, actors could not comment on their colleagues' presence until the curtain of the theatre closed (Krutnik, 2003). Although slight difference was observed in some of Aristophanes' and Shakespeare's works where performers could comment on their presence, later theatre acting emphasized on pure fiction.

Lacking spectators immensely, the classical theatres based their performances on historical events, which partially explains the linear nature of

narration in comedian comedy films. Performers in classical films, thus, should be able to assume the new characteristics, avoiding the influence of spectators and position themselves in historical context of the films and forgetting that this is merely a staged performance.

Analyzing classic films and the role comedians, one can spot a tangible tension between the known character of a comedian and the assigned role in the context of the film. A comedian is challenged to maintain a balance between the old character and the new character. The other challenge is that the audience takes a comedian as a comic figure, which makes it difficult to convey the peculiarities of the plot and the movie hero. However, this challenge does not concern comedians in comedian comedy alone – the same difficulty is observed in all movies when the stars try to take the roles other than those they are used to star in (Beach, 2002). When a star embodies a new character in a film, the audience finds it difficult to shift their vision of the given comic actor from the usual image to something completely different. The conflict between a movie star and the new persona in the film is, in fact, a conflict between the star's identity and the new roles in the film.

Example of Disruption

Disruptive nature of a comedian comedy is evident in many films. Keaton is one of comedians and filmmakers that have succeeded in this area. *The Playhouse*, one of the most famous comedian comedies, is a good example of the disruptive nature of the latter (Jenkins, 2004). *The Playhouse* gives Keaton an opportunity to show her skills as a performer. As the film is based of Vaudevilles repertoire, the film allows Keaton to portray various characters of vaudevilles nature. In the film, Keaton plays musical instruments, dresses in rags, acts as a trained monkey, does some acrobatics and performs other actions rather unusual for her image in the cinema. All

these roles are done in a single film where he takes more than one role in a single fixture (Jenkins, 2004). The films are split into short episodes that when brought together constitute the film.

The short episodes in Keaton films seem like prototypes for the feature films. However, when looked in isolation, the short episodes show evidence of disruptiveness. The episodes are based on non-narrative and semi-narrative structure, where the features of the films are not purely linear but adopt non-fictional character. For example, Keaton overlooks the classic demand for storytelling to feature what he considers important in his film. The Vaudevillian obsession of performance, aesthetic and spectacle is addressed at the expense of classical narration demands. The short episodes seem to parody other film genres such as *The Paleface*. One should also mark that these films transform causality in a classical film into an absurd joke. The theme in the movie also varies in every which way possible. Instead of the systematic order of the classical cinema, a new order is created and put into practice.

Apart from the non-conformity with classical requirement, the film shows other features of disruptiveness. The film keeps returning to the structure of disruptiveness (Jenkins, 2004) and, thus, fails to follow the conventional linear structure. As Keaton acts, the audience cannot shake off the impression that he is not fully aware of the abovementioned changes that occurred to the comedian comedy genre. For example, Keaton would try to make out the next steps in the film (Jenkins, 2004). Another disruptive scene in the film becomes obvious when Keaton's stagehand is forced to intervene as performers fail to deliver the message of the play. Buster, however, only watches the action helplessly. Because of the impersonation, an actor dissolves into another character (Jenkins, 2004). For example, Buster's bestial

nature that finally takes its toll over the character forces the actor return back into the primitive. The frenzy of performance in the film is also disruptive. The performance destabilizes everything in the film by creating scenes that are inconsistent to classic narration.

Conclusion

Comedy is one of the most important forms of entertainment in the entire world today. Comedies have been in entertainment for a long time, developing from ancient Greek comedies played in festivals. Later comedies became an important artistic and cultural element in western culture. Aristophanes' and Shakespeare's works are the most known ones in classic comedies. Stand-up comedies and television comedies are the most known forms of comedies. Comedian comedies, however, have developed to be one of important forms of comedies in films. Disruptiveness is a common feature in the comedian comedies. The known character of a comedian and the assumption of presence of spectators make comedian not to fit in the classical fictional narrative. Keaton and Buster are some of performers that portray disruptiveness in their work.

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