

On the Dual Narrative Space of the Film "Assassin in Red"

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Abstract. The construction of the story world in movies is mainly achieved through the expressive function of space. In the movie "Assassin in Red", the dual narrative space of surrealism creates a fantasy aesthetic intertwined with reality and the alien world. The two narrative spaces are full of connections and interactions, greatly breaking through the audience's life experience and aesthetic cognition, becoming a quite eye-catching presence during the Spring Festival period. This article will focus on exploring the parallel world of the movie "Assassination of the Novelist", where the vertical Chongqing mountain city structure in the real space serves as a metaphor for power and class, and the closed imperial capital space has a utopian illusion function, making the novel world a reflexive reflection on the real world, and the real world a reference for the novel world. By interpreting the dual space, we will better explore the inspiration this film brings to our society.

Keywords: Assassinating a Novelist; Heterotopia; Spatial Narrative.

1. Introduction

The film "Assassination of the Novelist" was released in the 2021 Spring Festival season, telling the story of Guan Ning, whose child was kidnapped and who had been struggling for six years without success, reaching an agreement with Aladdin's boss, Li Muda, to exchange the murder of novelist Lu Kongwen for clues about his daughter, Xiao Orange. In his constant interaction with Lu Kongwen, Guan Ning accidentally discovered the "Little Orange" with the same name as his daughter in the novel "God Killing", which ignited his determination to change reality through the novel. So Guan Ning gave up the assassination and worked with the novelist to complete the "God Killing", ultimately reuniting with his daughter. The director's ingenious creation of a dual world narrative model brings two completely different yet interconnected urban spaces to this film. The undulating and rainy Chongqing mountain city in real space is a narrative structure established by the director in accordance with the order of reality. The metaphorical function of the vertical space that divides up and down intuitively demonstrates the control of spatial discourse, power, and order production over character behavior, discourse, and thought. The fate of characters always shares the same destiny with the vertical space. The magical and closed world capitals in fictional/fictional spaces are important tools used by directors to break the order structure of the real space in movies and promote the narrative process. In the movie, both real and fictional spaces present wonders and gorgeous qualities, complemented by elements such as language, light and shadow, and sound effects. This not only provides a rich source of information and impactful visual presentation for the film's narrative, but also gives the film's narrative a deeper and deeper meaning.

2. Reality - The Metaphorical Function of Vertical Space

Chongqing is located in southwestern China, on the edge of the Sichuan Basin. With titles such as "Mountain City" and "Fog City", the surrounding mountains and crisscrossing rivers combine hardness and softness, adding poetry and spirituality to this city, giving people a sense of mystery and fantasy. The urban area of Chongqing exhibits a very obvious staggered regional form in space, with many urban images overlapping and accumulating, such as river crossing cable cars, pedestrian stairs, rooftops, and undulating roads, making this city also jokingly known as the "8D" magical city. In recent years, in many movies that depict the urban landscape of Chongqing, the continuous movement of the camera has depicted the three-dimensional sense of the city. Although it is only a glimpse, the vertical spatial structure that subverts the traditional urban form is enough to make the audience feel the heterogeneity and charm of the city where the scene is located. Lu Yang, the director

of "Assassination of Novelists", mentioned in an interview that he chose Chongqing as the filming location because it has a less realistic or magical urban structure. In the film, he is also quite enthusiastic about using the two protagonists' roaming in the city to drive scene changes, directly showcasing Chongqing's magical and scattered urban spaces, bringing viewers a spectacular visual experience. The film space, as a space constructed by the fusion of multiple elements, not only presents the material space of character activity, but also has a more profound metaphorical space. In "Assassination of the Novelist", director Lu Yang uses vertical space as an important means of narrative development in the film, not only allowing viewers to see the magic of Chongqing city, but more importantly, he uses the socially solidified space "program" and movie symbols to establish a metaphorical space for the film that "has both illocutionary meanings and ideological extensions", achieving metaphorical functions beyond narrative. In the film, spatial design has more readability, allowing viewers to enjoy the aesthetic feelings brought by this heterogeneous space while also triggering thinking.

Lefebvre has clearly put forward: "Space is social; it involves the social relations of reproduction, that is, the physiological physical relations between gender and age and specific family organizations, and also involves the relations of production, that is, labor and organizational differentiation." [1] This means that space has the function of dividing different social strata, power, and gender. The miraculous vertical spatial structure in "Assassination of the Novelist" creates a completely different class life picture for Li Mu (the wealthy class), Lu Kongwen (the poor class), and Guan Ning, who wanders between the two. As the president of Aladdin Group, Li Mu is located in the center of Shanghai center and even the center of the stage, with spacious, bright and intelligent private medical equipment. However, Guan Ning, who had lost his fighting spirit, and Lu Kongwen, who was gnawing old at home, could only wander at the bottom of the Chongqing mountain city, living in narrow, dark, and humid places. As a city built on a peninsula surrounded by both sides, Chongqing's main city is divided into two parts due to its high terrain in the north and low terrain in the south. The high and flat upper half of the city is the center of power and capital, while the lower half of the city becomes a gathering place for the bottom poor due to its low terrain and the risk of flooding. At the climax of the film, Lu Kongwen and Guan Ning stand on the rooftop overlooking Chongqing, creating an illusion of inversion between the upper and lower levels, as if Lu Kongwen achieved the flow of hierarchy through "writing". But as the director's camera swayed, the stacked houses in the mountain city once again placed their roofs at the bottom of the screen and the city, and the hierarchy was solidified again. The film divides clear upper and lower boundaries between different levels through different urban spaces and the unique vertical spatial structure of Chongqing.

Because space is both the foundation of public life and the foundation of power operation, people's space is usually proportional to their social status, resource possession, and power held. The vertical space presented in "Assassination of the Novelist" becomes a metaphor for dividing the power of different classes. At the press conference of the divine lamp, Li Mu's giant holographic image was presented, and the audience bowed down and looked up at the camera, showcasing Li Mu's vertical image as the ruler who overlooks and controls sentient beings. Li Mu believes that the biggest selling point of Shendeng software (similar to WeChat, which can play games, socialize, shop, and even seek medical treatment, report to the police, and arrest thieves.) is that it can make "time and distance are not problems", and his ambition to control time and space makes him unable to tolerate or constantly urge restless grassroots people to trespass on space, as well as the potential threat to his power. Lu Kongwen's novels exposed various ugly deeds of Li Mu, shaking his upper class position. Therefore, Li Mu arranged for a killer to assassinate Lu Kongwen. One of the reasons why Li Mu chose Guan Ning was his superb throwing ability, and the scattered urban structure of Chongqing could become an excellent shelter for Guan Ning, allowing him to better utilize his skills. From a formal perspective, this top-down shooting skill is a metaphor for the arbitrary deprivation and trampling of life by the upper class towards the lower class. As a puppet of the upper class, Guan Ning exercises the power of controlling the lower class people on behalf of the upper class, and implements spatial discipline on Lu Kongwen who wants to surpass the class. When Guan Ning questioned the upper echelons, the

assassin of the Shendeng Group drove swiftly down the slope. Lu Kongwen and Guan Ning had to roll down the side stairs to escape, and the assassination was once again presented as a vertical structure from top to bottom. The ladder, as a typical spatial symbol representing the distribution of power relations, serves as the dividing line between the lower and upper levels. When the assassin stood on the stairs overlooking Lu Kongwen and Guan Ning, and threatened to call the police, Guan Ning, as a wanted criminal, could only escape unhappily, and the lower class were once again forced back into the lower space.

In addition, vertical space also creates a difference in information acquisition power between the upper and lower levels. The magic lamp software developed by Li Mu in the movie can help him filter massive amounts of information for his own use, and can also monitor the actions of others, allowing him to always have the most comprehensive and intuitive first-hand information. Whether it's Tu Ling or Guan Ning, their information is always blocked, and Guan Ning is unable to obtain the complete story of God Killing. Tu Ling is kept in the dark and becomes an accomplice. As the bottom class people, the lack of access to information in Guanning and Lukong has always been closely related to Chongqing's unique mountain city space. The barrier formed by the overlapping mountains in Chongqing blocks the transmission of signals. As they shuttle through the bottom of the urban space, the weak signal prevents Guan Ning from viewing Lu Kongwen's latest novels. In the movie, the way for the lower class to obtain signals is by installing a large number of signal receivers on the roof, and the significant difference in information ownership between the two classes can be seen from the narrative logic of the movie space. However, the lack of signals in Chongqing also gives the protagonist the courage to break through the power cage. When entering the main roaming space, the director aimed his camera at a hand-painted map on the wall. Chongqing's intricate transportation routes often led to inaccurate positioning by mobile GPS, where the map was subverted as a symbol of power and colonization. The lack of signal means that there is an area that cannot be monitored from the upper level, which is where Guan Ning obtains the truth that his daughter has died.

In "Assassination of the Novelist", Chongqing's vertical space always participates in the tense and thrilling narrative of the film. While constructing the integrity of the film, it is endowed with profound connotations, providing viewers with space for interpretation and association. However, it is worth considering that Director Lu Yang, as the ultimate speaker of the entire film, excessively portrays the pre modern nature of Chongqing city. The only place in the film that showcases Chongqing's cultural level is an old, empty and uninhabited library, which comes from a certain ancient and solidified imagination of others. It reflects the director's lack of knowledge and technological understanding of the Sichuan Chongqing region as an elite class, portraying Chongqing as a backward and ignorant barbarian land, in stark contrast to the modern and technological metropolis of Shanghai in the film. The film always portrays the power generated by the director looking down at the lower space from the upper perspective, full of the imagination and gaze of the upper level towards the lower space.

3. Fiction - The Game Rules of Closed Spaces and Heterotopia Illusions

The term 'closed' in the Modern Chinese Dictionary means 'tightly covered or closed so that it cannot pass or be opened casually', which includes the content of spatial closure. In modern cinema, "enclosed space" is a common and important genre of film, which refers to the narrative of a film mainly unfolding in enclosed and isolated spaces. This space is the key battlefield of the entire film's narrative, and the words and actions of characters are relatively limited by location. But the "enclosed space" referred to by the author is not equivalent to the relatively closed and narrow physical places. Instead, the director uses narrative, props, light and shadow, sound effects, etc. in the film to trap the audience in a suppressed and tense atmosphere psychologically and visually. The game narrative logic of the film also casts a layer of utopian atmosphere on the enclosed space, which serves as a contrast to the main characters' thoughts, personalities. An important basis for psychology, soul, etc. In the movie "Assassination of the Novelist", the director uses space to construct a movie event and

uses a framing frame to capture an assassination event that occurred in the "real world". This film space, which is enclosed by the screen frame, is completely separated from the material world. David Harvey said, "The continuous use of images, the ability to flash back, and the leap of time and space have freed the film from the conventional constraints, although in the final analysis it is just a scene projected in the closed space of the flat screen" . It can be seen that the border of the movie screen is the first layer of closure in the film "Assassination of the Novelist", which separates the real material space from the film space. In addition, the "drama in the play" mode of storytelling in the film, and the cloud city in the novelist's pen that is isolated from the real space, form the second closed space of the film - the picture frame in the picture frame.

3.1 Game Rules in Enclosed Spaces

The novel "God Killing" tells the story of a young man named Kongwen who, in order to avenge his sister Panruo, embarked on the path of God Killing towards the imperial city. The characters encountered on the way, such as the Black Armored Old Man, Red Armored Warrior, mob, and Little Orange, gave him nothing but experience and props to help him successfully defeat the Big Boss Redhead Ghost. In the novel world, the protagonist's actions have a clear goal, and the story plot of fighting monsters and upgrading all the way gives the entire play a typical gamified linear narrative structure. The circular structure of the "gate in the door" in the movie becomes a node that separates different game levels. Following the path of the youth's empty text, the film gradually showcases the magnificent imperial city gate, square gate, Little Orange's home gate, and finally the gate of the Red Hair Ghost Palace. The game level continues to rise, and the difficulty continues to strengthen. The tightly nested "doors" not only enhance the sense of gameplay in the novel space, but also enhance the sense of closure in the screen. The imperial capital where the Red Hair Ghost resides is undoubtedly a huge and enclosed gaming field separated from daily life. Firstly, an unconditional and intimidating order dominates everything here, and those who enter the imperial capital must follow the rules of the game set by the Red Hair Ghost, alienating themselves into the fanatical followers of the Red Hair Ghost. Because the Red Hair Ghost likes to fight, the eighteen neighborhoods are enemies of each other, killing each other, and even the children are quietly shouting "kill kill kill". Psychologist Philip Zimbardo believes that extreme enclosed spaces often have environments and systems that trigger and sustain certain pathological behaviors and value choices that are not recognized in daily life. Director Lu Yang also cast a dark and cold tone over the entire world, highlighting the strong sense of instability and oppression within the enclosed space. Space must bring a cause and effect, a real change in fate to the characters. Therefore, the deterioration of the human heart in a different world seems inevitable. Secondly, the existence of enclosed spaces allows the characteristics of the game and its rules to play a dominant role, and becomes the preset condition and logical premise for the narrative of the film. In the film, the tense relationship between the game rulemaker (Red haired Ghost) and the gamer (Young Empty Text) revolves around the occupation and invasion of enclosed spaces. In such a heterogeneous space, the punishment for groups that do not obey the rules and are not alienated is to continuously deprive and compress their Lebensraum until their death. When the young Kongwen was chased by the Red haired Ghost's soldiers to the edge of the cliff, he suddenly realized that the world was all Red haired Ghosts, and he had nowhere to escape, thus opening his path of resistance. The lack of space has become an important opportunity to stimulate the character's awakening and potential for resistance. When trapped in the closed space by the mob, the young Kongwen's Lebensraum reached the upper limit, and his life was threatened. The conflicts between the characters broke out in a blowout way in the narrow closed space. He summoned the black armor, killed all people, and shaped the characters in the strongest form. The instability formed formed a dramatic tension. When a young man breaks into a palace enclosed by the Red Hair Ghost, it is a subversion and dissolution of the game rules and the authority of their creators by game players.

3.2 The Utopian Illusion of Game Space

This game space, which is endowed with symbolic meanings of "discipline and punishment", resistance and subversion, and is quite closed and heterogeneous, to some extent constitutes Foucault's "heterotopia" imagination for the narrative space of movies. In Foucault's view, dystopia refers to places that exist in the real society, and at the same time form an order system with clear functions that is different from the outside. These dystopian places coexist in the society we live in, forming a mirror mapping relationship with the real world. The novel world in movies is derived from the real life experiences of novelist Lu Kongwen, and has a strong correlation with the real world. Corresponding characters and scenes can be found in both worlds. However, in real space, Lu Kongwen is just an anonymous novelist, unable to resist Li Mu after experiencing repeated failures, and even suffered serious injuries for this. But in the alien world, as an intruder who contradicts the value system of the dystopian space, the juvenile empty text not only imitates the vertical division of power in the real world and judges the red haired ghost from top to bottom, but also endows his revenge with a grand connotation of saving lives. Heterotopia has the function of creating an illusion space, which reveals all the real space and is simply even more illusory... This may not be an illusion heterotopia, but a compensation heterotopia. In a sense, the novel space is the externalization of Lu Kongwen's psychological space, which also has a soothing function. It is Lu Kongwen's spiritual compensation for his disappointment in real life and also his self healing.

At the same time, the utopia of this illusion also compensates for the loss of the off camera narrator. *Assassination of the Novelist* is a short story published by author Shuang Xuetao in 2013. The title is filled with the suppression of power over everything that can express the truth in literature, art, and other fields, which is in line with Shuang Xuetao's state of mind that his career is at a low point and his submissions are always facing obstacles. The original novel has a strong sense of realism, and director Lu Yang's emphasis on the setting of "the novel changes the world" in the film fills the film with an idealistic sparkle. So the assassination of young Kongwen/Guan Ning, the writing of Shuang Xuetao/Lu Kongwen, and the creation of Lu Yang/Shuang Xuetao present a Mobius loop like knot in the wonderful counterpoint connection. With the inspiration of writing beliefs, they enter the "alien world" of novels or movies, becoming an opportunity for the author to bridge the gap between themselves and social reality in reflexive narratives. For viewers, the films released on New Year's Eve should often have a certain function of soothing and longing for the future. Therefore, in *"Assassination of the Novelist"*, the dystopian space is also maximizing compensation for the spiritual needs of "workers", giving them the imagination gap to escape or even subvert power and capital (old board) control. However, the director arranges the last scene in the hospital, a real world heterotopia, which makes the compensation function of heterotopia space become illusory.

4. Epilogue

In summary, director Lu Yang creatively grasps and applies the form of spatial organization, first establishing a space for the audience that has a mirror mapping relationship with reality but is not reality. In this space, the vertical structure highlights the intricate relationships between people, class and class, power and power, showcasing the suffering and struggle of the lower class people; Secondly, the high cost special effects lens takes us into a closed "wonderful world", which is not only a mirror of reality, but also a space filled with idealistic flashes, serving as a utopian illusion to compensate for the loss experienced by creators, viewers, Lu Kongwen/Guan Ning, and other real-life experiences. As the first film in China to twist fantasy imagination and real emotions in the narrative dimension, the unique dual space of the film *"Assassination of the Novelist"* outlines the main thread of the story, providing support and carrier for the film's theme expression and emotional clues. The progress of the film industry and visual effects technology also opens up higher and farther creative space for imagination, And the visualization of fantasy plots has not concealed the humanistic care of the film itself.

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