

The significant form: Visual symbols and cultural symbolism in film

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Abstract: *As a kind of mass media, film has its unique storytelling mode and visual language. Through elements such as video, music, performance and text, the audience is transported into a "significant" virtual world. In this world, filmmakers convey deep cultural information to the audience through the use of various visual symbols and symbols. At the same time, as a comprehensive art form, the constituent elements of film have diversity and complexity, and these elements are combined and arranged in a specific way to form a special form of film. Clive Bell's theory of "significant form" has important guiding significance for explaining the close relationship between the form and the content of the film, as well as the aesthetic emotion aroused by this form. This article will explore how films use visual symbols and cultural symbols to express deep meanings and the importance of these significances in film viewing.*

Keywords: *Significant form; Film; Visual symbols; Cultural symbol*

1. Introduction

The "Significant form" proposed by Clive Bell refers to a special, mysterious and indescribable aesthetic emotion in a work of art, which is a pure relationship combined by the arrangement of lines and colors in a certain way. This form has a special attraction, can stimulate the viewer's aesthetic feelings, so that the viewer feels a unique sense of pleasure. Clive Bell believes that this form is the common essence of art, it is the common feature of all works of art. "Significant form" emphasizes the close relationship between the content and the form of a work of art, believing that the form is the external expression of the content, while the content is the internal meaning of the form. This relationship between form and content is a symbiotic relationship, they influence and support each other, and together constitute a complete work of art.

Form in film mainly refers to the way in which elements such as film images, music, text, and color are combined and arranged in a specific way. The form of the film is the external expression of the content of the film, which conveys the idea, emotion and experience of the film through image, sound, text, color and other elements. In film, form and content are closely related, form is the means of expression of content, and content is the inner meaning of form. The significance in the film mainly refers to the special emotions and experiences conveyed by the film form. This kind of significance is a special, mysterious and indescribable aesthetic emotion felt by the movie audience when watching the movie. It is inspired by the form in the film and is the combination of the film form and the audience's aesthetic experience. In film, significance is the internal meaning of the form, the special emotions and experiences that the form conveys. The significant form in the film is mainly a special, mysterious and indescribable aesthetic emotion felt by the film audience, which is composed of the form and significance in the film. In the film, the significant form is the combination of the form and content of the film, the combination of the film form and the audience's aesthetic experience.

2. The use of visual symbols in film

2.1. Visual symbol concept

Visual symbols are part of the semiotic system. Professor Zhao Yiheng, director of the Semiotics and Communication Research Center of the School of Literature and Journalism of Sichuan University, believes that: A symbol is a perception that carries a certain meaning, and the meaning of a visual symbol is similar to this. Its definition standard is to transmit a certain meaning through a visual perception channel, that is, a symbol that can be received by the visual senses is a visual symbol. Art is

the key description means and way of visual symbols, and it is a form with the most visual performance characteristics in human history. Painting (including ancient totem symbols), sculpture and architecture were considered as image arts with symbolic meaning in the early stage of research, each of which represents the culture in a certain field, providing visual elements basis for the approach of art research in later generations. With the progress of The Times, the research scope of visual symbols has further penetrated into people's lives, from basic clothing, food, housing and transportation to entertainment and leisure activities such as movies, dramas, dances, etc., all forms seen can be called visual symbols.^[1]

Film visual symbol is a special symbol in film, which conveys information, shapes image and expresses emotion by means of image, color, light and shadow. Film visual symbol is an important part of film language, which can directly convey information, shape image and express emotion through visual expression, so as to arouse the audience's resonance and emotional resonance.

There are many types of film visual symbols, including color symbols, light symbols, image symbols and so on. Color symbols have a strong expression in the film, which can express emotion, create atmosphere and shape image through color contrast, change and collocation. Light and shadow symbols express emotions, create atmosphere and shape images by means of light and shade and shadow changes. The image symbol expresses emotion, creates atmosphere and shapes image through the combination, arrangement and change of image.

The use of visual symbols in movies is very extensive, it can directly convey information, shape images, express emotions through visual expression, so as to arouse the audience's resonance and emotional resonance. At the same time, the film visual symbol can also enhance the visual effect and artistic value of the film, so that the film is more attractive and infectious.

2.2. The use of visual symbols in film

Visual symbols are the basic elements of film language, conveying information through images, colors, shapes, movements and photographic techniques. Film directors often use visual symbols to construct scenes, develop characters, and express emotions. The choice and use of visual symbols have a profound impact on the narrative and meaning of films.

The use of visual symbols in movies is very extensive. Film directors can express emotions, create atmosphere and shape images through color contrast, change and collocation. For example, red is often used to show love and passion, while blue is used to show calm and melancholy. In the *Godfather*, for example, the use of black conveys the shadow of power and the dark side of family. In the American film *Forrest Gump*, Forrest Gump's costume has become a classic visual symbol. His outfit consists of a simple white shirt and blue pants, very plain, but very representative. This visual symbol conveys Forrest Gump's simple, sincere and pure mind, and also represents his special place in American history.

Light and shadow symbols can also express emotions, create atmosphere and shape images by means of light and shade and shadow changes. For example, dim light is often used to show sadness and mystery, while bright light is used to show hope and joy. The use of light to render the overall atmosphere of the film is a common technique in film creation, such as direct light and scattered light will bring different visual experience and aesthetic feelings to the audience. So in the opening part of the film *Les Quatre Cents Coups*, the director used a long lens to shoot the scene around the Eiffel Tower. At this time, the film picture is completely using natural light, because it is slightly cloudy, the light is not strong, and the whole is filled with a form of scattered light in the film picture. In the film, it can be seen that Anthony is almost always in the low-key part of the picture when he is with a teacher or a parent, and the brightness of his body is lower than that of other characters. The contrast of light and dark not only gives visual guidance to the audience, but also makes the film picture have a certain ambiguity.^[2]

The image symbol expresses emotion, creates atmosphere and shapes image through the combination, arrangement and change of image. For example, jumping shots are often used to show tension and excitement, while slow shots are used to show calm and grace. A jump shot in a film is a jump that omits some plot or transition in a discontinuous film scene in order to speed up the story pace or save time. This shooting technique is often used at the climax or end of a movie to enhance the audience's sense of tension and excitement. Jumping shots can be achieved through quick editing, music and special effects, making the audience feel a strong impact both visually and aural. In some cases, a jump shot in a movie can also be used to suggest a plot progression or twist, or to reveal a

character's inner world and emotions. For example, in the film *Inception*, Cobb jumps from scene to scene through a jump shot to show the transition between his dream world and the real world, as well as the complex emotional relationship between him and his wife, Nolan.

In addition, visual symbols can also enhance the visual effect and artistic value of the film. Through the clever use of visual symbols, movies can be more vivid, infectious and memorable. In *Star Wars*, for example, Lucas used unique light and shadow techniques and visual effects to create stunning planets and alien creatures that made viewers feel like they were in a whole new universe.

In short, the use of visual symbols in movies plays a crucial role in the expression and communication of movies. Film directors can enhance the visual effect and artistic value of films by skillfully using visual symbols to express emotions, create atmosphere and shape images. Visual symbol is an important part of film art, its use makes the film more vivid, infectious and unforgettable.

3. The embodiment of cultural symbol in film

As a global cultural phenomenon, film presents the cultural characteristics of different countries and regions in its unique way. The cultural symbols in the film are presented in various forms such as visual, auditory and narrative means, which not only enriches the visual and auditory effects of the film, but also conveys the deep cultural connotation.

3.1. History

Movies are often the inheritors of history and culture, showing the cultural features of a specific historical period through the scenes, costumes and props in the movies. For example, the ancient imperial palace, the Great Wall and other elements in Chinese movies reflect the glorious history of ancient China; Westerns in American movies represent the western frontier period in American history.

For example, in the movie *The Great Escape*, the hero's courage and perseverance symbolize the American spirit. At the same time, the film also challenges the audience's understanding and awareness of different cultures by presenting diverse cultures. In the movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the fighting scenes in the bamboo forest became a classic cultural symbol. In this scene, the green and upright form of bamboo, combined with the martial arts and moves, presents a sense of Oriental elegance and power. This cultural symbol not only represents the eastern culture, but also represents the essence of Wuxia culture.

3.2. Politics

Political symbolism in films is often expressed through storytelling, character setting and visual means. For example, the image of Red Square in the Soviet movie *Bronenosets Potemkin* reflects the political background of the Soviet Union during the revolutionary period; On the other hand, the Chinese film *The Founding of a Republic* reflects the evolution of Chinese politics by presenting the historical events during the founding of China.

3.3. Cultural tradition

The cultural traditions of different countries and regions are also fully reflected in the film. For example, elements such as martial arts and wuxia stories in Chinese films reflect traditional Chinese wuxia culture; Elements such as cherry blossoms and kimonos in Japanese films reflect the aesthetic characteristics of Japan.

3.4. The value and influence of cultural symbol in film

Cultural symbols in films are an important form of cultural communication in countries and regions. Through the extensive dissemination of films, people's cognition and understanding of different cultures can be enhanced. At the same time, cultural symbolism is also a marketing strategy of film producers to attract audience's attention and recognition by presenting unique cultural phenomena in films. Cultural symbols in movies have a profound impact on the audience, not only affecting the audience's understanding and cognition of different cultures, but also influencing the audience's values and behaviors. For example, the image of cowboys in Hollywood films has influenced the global audience's cognition of American western culture. The images of samurai in Japanese movies have

influenced people's understanding of Japanese culture. Taking Soviet films as an example, there are a large number of Chinese cultural elements such as architecture, clothing, nature and animals, which play a certain role in the international dissemination of Chinese images and promote the exchange and interaction between Chinese and Russian films. The 1958 Soviet film *Ch. P. - Chrezvychnoe proisshestvie* is based on the real event that the Soviet cruise ship *Poltava* was hijacked to Taiwan (China) by a warship of Chiang Kai-shek Clique in 1954. All the crew members on the cruise ship were detained by Chiang Kai-shek Clique in a villa. The villa's architectural style is typical Chinese architecture, and the courtyard and attic are typical Chinese style. Rosewood columns and curved wooden roofs, plant-tree and beach in southern China in the picture, Soviet sailors who escaped in the film went to the French consulate for help on a rainy night, and the Chinese-style streets and alleys along the way were full of Chinese-style buildings and plaques with Chinese characters scattered high and low, radiating a simple Oriental charm.^[3]

4. The interaction between visual symbols and cultural symbols

There is an interactive relationship between the visual symbol and the cultural symbol of the film. Films represent cultural symbols through visual symbols, and audiences can further understand the deep meaning and theme of films by interpreting visual symbols and understanding cultural symbols. This kind of interaction has important influence and significance for the audience, which can not only help the audience to better understand the film, but also stimulate the audience's cultural thinking and aesthetic experience, and improve the audience's cultural appreciation ability.

In some cases, visual symbols and cultural symbols can reinforce each other in a film to produce a deeper meaning. For example, in the film *The Shape of Water*, water, as a visual symbol, is also a cultural symbol, expressing the relationship between man and nature, and exploring the isolation and tolerance between man and aliens.

Visual symbols and cultural symbols in film interact. On the one hand, visual symbols can better represent cultural symbols. For example, in the movie *Titanic*, the statues and murals on the ship became a cultural symbol, representing the sophistication and luxury of the aristocratic culture of the time.

On the other hand, cultural symbols can also better express the meaning of visual symbols. For example, in the movie *Star Wars*, the lightsaber became a classic visual symbol, and the philosophical significance it represents is a cultural symbol of the entire franchise.

5. The importance of meaningful form in film viewing

Clive Bell believed that the essence of a work of art lies in its "significant form". This form is created by the artist's unique way of expression, which can trigger the audience's aesthetic feelings and thinking. In film, significant forms are mainly embodied in elements such as image, music and editing, which together constitute a complete artistic expression. In film viewing, the audience perceives the overall form of the film, understands the cultural significance behind it and the emotion that the artist wants to convey. For example, when the director uses special shooting techniques, editing skills and sound effects to express the theme and emotion of the film, the audience can understand and feel the connotation of the film more deeply according to the significant formal theory.

Visual symbols and cultural symbols in films can not only convey information, but also have an impact on the audience. On the one hand, the audience can understand the theme and emotion of the film through visual symbols and cultural symbols, so as to better understand the story. On the other hand, these symbols and symbols can also influence the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of the audience. For example, in the movie *Braveheart*, the image of the hero William Wallace has become a classic visual symbol, and the cultural symbol of freedom and justice he represents has also deeply influenced the attitude and belief of the audience.

5.1. To elevate the audience's aesthetic experience

Using significant form theory, the audience can pay more attention to the form and details of the film when watching the film, so as to enhance the aesthetic experience. For example, in some emotive films, by paying attention to the performance details of the actors, the use of the camera and the choice of background music, the audience can more deeply experience the emotions conveyed by the film.

5.2. Deepening Audience's Cultural Understanding

The significant form theory emphasizes the audience's exploration of the cultural meaning behind the film form. When watching a movie, the audience can understand the cultural information conveyed by the movie more deeply by paying attention to the cultural symbols, historical background and other elements in the movie, so as to broaden the cultural vision.

5.3. Stimulating the audience's creative thinking

According to the theory of significant form, when watching a movie, the audience will not only accept the message conveyed by the movie, but also interpret and reflect on the movie on the basis of their own experience. This process of interpretation and reflection can stimulate the audience's creative thinking and improve their artistic appreciation and innovation ability.

5.4. Restriction

The application of significant formal theory in film viewing also has certain limitations. For example, due to the influence of cultural background, aesthetic experience and other factors, different audiences may have great differences in the interpretation of film forms. In addition, commercial interests and other factors may lead directors and producers to over-pursue box office while neglecting the artistry and depth of the film.

6. Conclusions

Film uses visual symbols and cultural symbols in significant forms to deeply explore and convey feelings, ideas and cultures. This language goes beyond words and touches people's senses and hearts. By studying the visual symbols and cultural symbols in movies, we can better understand and appreciate the artistic value and social significance of movies.

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