

An Invasion of Movies: From the Spectator to the Player

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Abstract: *In terms of technology, movies have always been the most fashionable topic since its birth. With the rise of concepts such as virtual reality and the metaverse, the issue between movies and the interactivity has once again attracted people's attention. In a broad sense, as a mass media, movies and the audience always maintain an intimate democratic relationship. But from the perspective of ontology, movies, as a "dream", seem to be untouchable in many cases. Has the audience-to-user transition been triggered from the visible timeline? This article will provide some basic discussions on this.*

Keywords: *virtual reality, interactivity of movies, video tape, video game*

1. Introduction

Before the space of watching a movie was transformed from a public cinema into a private home theater, techniques such as widescreen, ball screen, ring screen, surround sound, dynamic seats and the use of wind, temperature, water mist, gas came into being one after another, filling the dark perceptual space of public cinemas. "By means of a natural, intuitive and close physical contact interface, public cinemas could activate people's senses to the greatest extent. According to this illusion technology program, the senses of simulated stereo, texture and touch, as well as temperature and even kinesthetic perception are integrated to convey the illusion existing in the complex structural space of nature to the audience, and create the strongest sense of immersion as far as possible. "[1] All this attempts to eliminate the sense of distance between the screen space and the viewing space and make up for the "absence" of the audience. However, they do not emphasize the interaction which actually eliminate the sense of spatial distance and "absence". The audience's real involvement in the movie can be seized in the video tapes.

2. A visible Timeline

The advent of video tape has changed the storage medium of movies. People can select the node of screening by pressing the button of "rewind" or "fast forward". The audience in traditional cinemas cannot participate in the screening activities. They can only sit on their seats and receive all the information passively. Due to the isolation from the outside world, this also means that the screening time is concealed. However, starting from video tapes to DVDs and then to computers and mobile phones the time of watching a movie has become more visible and controllable.

The audience can skip what they are not interested in or those lengthy plots. They can also look back at those missed interesting points because of the absent-mindedness. Watching is no longer a passive behavior. The audience have simplified the process by choosing the information they want. If the time about movies was fluid in the past, with the timeline becoming clearer and more visible, it has become more stable and static. It is difficult for us to feel the passage of time in dreams, that is why we always feel that the sleep with a dream is short. If we can be aware of the ruler of time in our dreams, then we will not mistakenly think that sleep is short because of the consciousness of short dreams. The length of the movie becomes short, however, we can still realize the changes in time, even though a decade or a hundred years has passed in the movie.

The controllable timeline makes the movie more like an exquisite object that can be played at any time. It has become easier for us to find and extract more details, even the static meaning of one or two frames in *Fight Club*(1999). At the same time, for many people, the movie has become a story of a few-minute retelling. They re-edit these important fragments from the timeline, solidifying the meaning

of the movie and simplifying the narrative in a more precise degree.

All the changes have taken place since the digital non-linear editing replaced the linear editing of traditional film and video tape. It is no need to talk about the way of watching a movie or the aesthetic that has undergone earth-shaking changes. We can imagine that the visibility and control of the timeline will provide more movie-watching possibilities. For the audience, movies are no longer just a composition of shots, but a frame. These frames are cut out and uploaded to the social network by the audience. They give the frame an introduction---only a proof of their performance rather than criticism. Movies have been abstracted, and the audience are the initiator. We attribute it to the need for a result, that is, the purpose of watching a movie or the sense of identity has become extremely clear. They simplify the movie and all the complex scene scheduling or montages are simplified accordingly. Just like what we have seen in some short videos which always give a brief introduction. On the other hand, audience has gained the power to fully interpret the original work. They dismember the movie by re-dubbing it in dialects or making a certain part of the movie into a GIF with some vivid texts. The basis of these ideas first came from the movies. What is more significant is that audience has begun to invade movies.

Movies are not eternal. When watching a movie, audience always enters the new 24 frames in the next second unless the film is destructed. The old images will disappear over time and the imagination will be reclassified by the actual "image". Unlike a simple picture or word, the audience will pass by the previous images as time goes by. Like sitting in a car and viewing the scenery, we always want to keep a constantly fading moment. Perhaps this can explain the motivation for the movie to be paused and cut out. It is a need for the lack of integrity of the past. We hope this explanation will not be too far-fetched. In fact, as time is constantly flowing, people cannot keep still on the time scale generally unless the time stagnates. It seems that the creators can no longer set the audience to watch movies passively in a predetermined order. The timeline is also in the hands of the audience.

3. Viewing Space and Bullet Screen

Intuitively, the distance between the movie projection terminal and the audience is getting closer. From the cinema screen to the TV screen, then to the computer monitor and finally to the mobile phone or tablet computer held by the audience, the spatial distance between the movie contents and the audience has been shortened. The viewing space has changed from traditional sharing to exclusive use. With the popularity of portable devices, viewing methods have become more diverse and convenient as well. The mobile phone, as a medium that effectively fills the gap in time, also determines the form of its carrying contents, fragmented, flat, and exclusive of logic. Watching a movie can happen anywhere and anytime with smart phones in hand.

Once a smart phone is turned on, all our oral communication is unnecessary. The most important thing is that there seems no need for the body to exist. It is redundant except for the function of connecting a brain with another brain. The mobile phone is a complex that integrates network technology and communication technology. In social software, we have completed the virtual human-to-human interaction through videos, emojis, etc. As a result, the interaction of human conscious activities becomes the main body, while body movements and other perception functions are replaced. These crashed bodies are in a state of almost "unmoved".

The wandering between private and public viewing space has once again constructed a public space in the process of the occurrence and popularization of another new media technology—bullet screen. However, this space no longer actually exists. It is virtualized. Except for screenings like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), which encourage the audience to revel or interact, interaction is almost forbidden in the cinema manners. "Bullet screen" renders watching movies no longer lonely, and it also spawns a new movie-watching culture.

In the silent and dark night, as the perception fades, there is always a surge of thoughts. It is reasonable to believe that the downtime of the body creates active and sensitive consciousness, a sense of immersion. Attention to "bullet screen" will interfere with our immersion in the film, and vice versa. Even if we prefer a pure watching environment, the screen overlaid with multiple "bullets" tells us that some people are accustomed to and accept the existence of bullet screen. Can audience become a part of the creation of the movie? Are they also practicing Roland Barthes' textual activities? While watching movies, people will express their opinions about the movie via sending bullet screens. Regardless of whether the contents are superficial or not, the audience participate in the movie watching activities. Even if it is difficult for them to change how the plots will unfold, the words on the

screens always affect other audience who choose to see those "bullets", and they rich the timeline simultaneously.

4. Choice and Accident: Movie and Game Movie

The creativity of movies aims in breaking through limits. We will find complex and mysterious conjectures about life in *Rashomon* (1950) or *Run Lola Run* (1998).

Some scholars believe that *Run Lola Run* is influenced by video games. In order to save her imprisoned boyfriend Manni, after failing in the first two assumptions, Lola finally succeeded in her third attempt. The movie adopts a seemingly diverse and anti-structural approach to present the events with multiple possibilities. It is really like a video game. Lola faced the "Super Mario" type of problem after constantly trial and error. She started over again. Every choice of Lola retained the correction of her past actions, which drives the narrative to the end by summarizing her previous failed experiences. This narrative structure is very similar to "round" or "saving and loading" in video games. However, as a linear audio-visual language, the process in which Lola achieves the ultimate goal by correcting her action, is first subject to chronological order. The game is not quite the same. Perhaps I have already won (or lost) in the first round, I may also reach other possible endings in different ways afterwards. Therefore, rather than saying that the movie is similar to a game, it is better to say that it "advances within a certain limit of time and space, by means of a visible order". The audience and the characters "abide by the rules of voluntary acceptance" and keep outside of the "objective reality" in the state of empathy. At the same time, it records the whole game in a way similar to game videos, and follows a linear narrative structure--solidification.

In 1967, Czechoslovakia showcased a movie called *Clovek a jeho dum*(1967) at the Montreal Exposition. The viewing process was quite interesting, with pausing at each plot point. Then the host would guide the audience to decide on the next segment by playing through the voting device in their hands. This may be the earliest prototype of "interactive movie", where the audience begins to determine the narrative direction, and the possibilities of the movie are as simultaneous as forked paths. We cannot yet call *Clovek a jeho dum* a game here, even though it already has the characteristics of interactive narrative. In video games, a request for audiovisual language is often designed as a "reward" to drive the game process (it is not the only and necessary). In this special movie, interactivity (or entertainment) serves as a complementary mechanism.

Furthermore, narrativity is not the purpose of early video games. It is not even possessed by early traditional game activities such as Go, Cuju, Senit, bridge, etc. In *Breakout*(1976), *Pac-Man* (1980), *Tetris*(1989), or William Heigenbaum's *Tennis for Two*(1958), game designers utilize the interactivity of puzzle solving to provide a sense of achievement. It is not until later, in genre games such as text adventures (sometimes referred to as "Quest Soft Player") or role-playing, that the progression of the story gradually become a reward which make the players to follow the rules voluntarily. Due to technological limitations, these early video games apply more texts for narrative. Unlike traditional narratives, producers want to to give narratives more possibilities with the help of the interactivity of new mediums, or in other words, video game narratives are based on interactive choices.

In the era of media convergence, the distance between movies and games has been becoming increasingly blurred. We could say that the image in the movie game is cinematic, however it has the main characteristics of a electronic game. It seems a revelation that we never call animation a painting roughly, nor a film a photograph. Does this mean that everything will be reclassified into a unique synthesis without distinctions and boundaries. If we make the distance between various media gradually narrow? What is certain is that game players still mainly look forward to the sense of accomplishment given by the endings. The ability to decide how the plot develops and the fate of the characters gives them a great sense of satisfaction. The exploration of different endings constitutes the presentation of the complexity of life and people's attempts to control their fate.

The reason why people persevere in the face of fate is that they never get what they want. Kieslowski has tried earlier to accommodate various possibilities of life in the movies. *Run Lola Run* seems to be another version of *Blind Chance*(1987), because Kieslowski always emphasizes the powerlessness of human beings in the face of fate gravely in his movies. *Run Lola Run* is a hypothesis in order to change the result. There is no fate, and everything can be changed through human's initiative. Witek, the hero of *Blind Chance*, is not allowed to fly to France under any of the three circumstances.

Kieslowski displays Witek's past at the beginning of the movie. People in the picture always look at the camera. The audience will realize that there seems to be another person in front of the subject, and there might be a timid voice sounding like "Me?" However, when the camera slowly pulls back, another person appears in the picture. The director seems to answer, "No, please make way." The participant appears, who belongs to Witek's private memory only, but Witek can not go back to the past. The man who lives in the moment is absent in the memory. The audience will also find that they are not the participant. The director has "cheated" us by the first seemingly subjective perspectives.

The irreversibility of movie time is sometimes really regrettable. It has a strong sense of destiny. The audience cannot choose and change the direction or result, no matter whether it is sad or happy. The fate of the characters in the movies has long been written on paper and carved into the image. The audience simply gaze at the transcendental existence in a temporal selection inscribed by the audiovisual. The audience, the same as Witek, in the web of fate, believes in chance. He believes that if it weren't for that train, he wouldn't have the current encounter. However, he couldn't change the fact that he couldn't go to France in any case. He can only be on one side of life at a time, just like the situation in which he repeatedly changes his perspective to see the three-dimensional picture of the crucified Christ in the church, opening his eyes from one angle and closing them from another. There is full of occasionality when he chooses a path. If he wants to go to the other side by another kind of chance, he must also fall back to the intersection. The movie will turn the occasionality into an inevitability. The audience will remain passive.

For the audience, the movie seems unable to engrave the time. The audience's sights are like a pointer of the timeline. We can only travel on one road at a time the same as Witek. There is no eternity. Only memories and perceptions conclude a relatively fixed "Gestalt". The memory of Witek is doubted which only appears once in *Blind Chance*. Witek meets his childhood friend Danny and recalls the scene of his separation from him. He thinks he himself clearly remembers Danny saying goodbye to him and climbing up to the car parked on the ramp. Indeed, the audience can see the car out of the depth of field in the beginning of the movie. However, Danny denies. If our sense towards a movie is solely compensated by memories, the "Gestalt" itself should be doubted.

Even though we have mastered the flexibility of choice in the game, time is still fluid for players. Fortunately, games can be saved at any time, and its deep interaction is immersive. However, this "Gestalt" is also suppressed. The lack of senses always leads to the breakdown of a certain part of the body. Regardless of forgetting their bodies for a short time, once their bodily functions are activated again and they feel a lack of space, the desire for completeness will once again urge them to set off in search of new sensory stimulation.

5. Virtual Reality Movie

Metz believes that when watching in a cinema, the audience is like a hiding person peeking through a keyhole. Although there are a large number of early virtual reality works, the contents still focus on a simple display of basic technical features, mostly themed on roller coasters or parkour. In some works rich in more complex virtual reality contents, the audience is exposed from the prying environment. In some virtual reality works, a "mirror" is set up, where players either see themselves or the appearance of the characters they play. As participants (users), people freely choose the viewing angle in such works - the story does not happen in front of them, but around them. The distance between the viewer and the scene has been suppressed in the virtual environment. Virtual reality movies allow users to be completely wrapped up in an airtight three-dimensional space in their perception - there is no longer a distance between people and events.

In some virtual reality short films such as *Henry* (2015) or *Lost*(2015), the sense of participation is not truly emphasized. In *Henry*, the player is always at Henry's (a hedgehog) house, watching everything that happens. The same applies to *Lost*, where the position of the player is fixed and the performance only unfolds in one direction. These works are more like movies that enhance the sense of dimensionality. Even though the smooth frame boundaries have been removed, the blurry boundaries still exist. On the other hand, like traditional movies, creators need to create points of interest in their works. Here are three characteristics in these works. Firstly, when the device recognizes that the audience is looking in the wrong direction, the narrative will pause until the audience observe the key elements. Secondly, the system presents events to the audience dynamically. The third is to arouse the audience's attention. [2]The premise for the design of these works is "attention", which means that they still tell stories in a linear manner. By utilizing visual, auditory and somatosensory guidance, they try to

lead users' attention to what they should (while excluding interference from other environments).

"The narrative function of virtual reality is weakened, and the audience's behavior plays a particularly important role in driving the story process. What is the most crucial depends on the audience, not just the creator". [3] That is to say, the creator no longer has an absolute advantage, while a more inclusive narrative space has become the mainstream of virtual reality works. The traditional narrative method guided by the creator has been tampered with, and the audience has an absolute right of choosing what to watch. If the three gates in *Tribe* (2016) turn into a plot selection window similar to a butterfly installation, the audience can also obtain the experience they want. The integration of wearable devices and human-computer interaction technology provides greater possibilities and development space for interactive narratives in virtual reality works. However, the virtual reality interaction implemented in *Tribe* is carried out through the user's viewpoint captured by the gyroscope in the headset. There is a small dot in the center of the field of view, and when the user concentrates this dot on a certain door for a period of time, it means selecting. The body is still inactive. In another virtual reality short film *HELP!*, though the viewable scenes are more diverse and the performance space is no longer limited to a part in front of them, the audience does not have the initiative to control the body. The audience seems to be driven during the entire process. It is quite paradoxical that the audience's head can move, and they even need to rotate their bodies to see what's happening behind them, but they just can't take control of action. Why do they have to see that terrifying alien creature?

"Ice and snow can have a calming effect. During a surgery, the patients wear VR glasses and play a game with glaciers, waterfalls, and snowmen to immerse in the game and forget about the pain. Here, VR is like a dose of anesthetic in consciousness, reducing pain through 'empathy'". [4] In virtual reality works, senses of players are fully mobilized. They act new roles with new bodies different from those in real life. News such as "virtual reality players accidentally hitting their bodies" do not imply that people are injured simultaneously in virtual reality. Metz believes that "the movie screen is a true spiritual substitute, a repair surgery we have performed on a dislocated limb from the beginning". [5] Bazin also believes that movies create a comprehensive illusion. In fact, more complete movies like *Henry* are deliberately avoiding "hallucination", which try to provide us a sense of complete belief, not doubt. This kind of belief is based on mobilizing all senses, that is, reality comes from real sensory experiences.

6. Conclusion

In other words, the interaction of modern media gives the audience more and more power. The creators also realize that they should share a part of power to the audience. In recent years, relative discussions have left many interesting questions. We can still deem that "virtual reality" has not yet emerged. As a medium that breaks away from the single dimension of form, may it ultimately bring media technology back into the embrace of perceptual phenomena? May it break away from movies as language or language itself? Its content seems to make the "body" appear in another realistic context, rather than just the communicating and expressive functions of language. The problem is that in their process of technological empowerment, what we are longing for is a story or reality? What is Movie? The innovation of technology makes more possibilities. At the same time, all the discussions based on ontology will once again bring about an inspiration to the form of movies. Facing with more complex realities and profound theories, these questions worth a continuing discussion.

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