

Unnatural Narrative in Film: Unnatural Audio-Visual Focus and Cognitive Focus

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Abstract: *In the narrative process of unnatural film, the construction of impossible story world depends on physical reality, but also mixes with physical or logical impossibility. The impossible story world is formally constructed through unnatural audiovisual means. In multimodal film discourse, this impossibility is often conveyed in the form of visual focus, auditory focus and other modes. The unnatural form of the audiovisual mode creates the unnatural content of the narrative, and then helps the audience's cognition focus on the unnatural content of the story. The combination of form and content promotes the audience to understand the creative intention and metaphorical meaning of the film.*

Keywords: *Unnatural narrative; Film narrative; Audio-Visual focus; Cognitive focus*

1. Introduction

The unnatural narrative of film refers to some unusual narrative techniques and means in the film, which break the traditional linear narrative mode and present the story through non-linear and unnatural narrative mode. The transcendental structure of postmodern films dispels linearity and logical or psychological relations, leaving only a transcendental, anti-logical and anti-dramatic narrative structure, while the narrative structure of postmodern films mainly relies on the spirituality and intuitive wisdom of the audience. Therefore, when deconstructing the impossible story world in unnatural films, starting from the content and form of the film, the audience can make judgment and identification of the plot and logic of the film from both audiovisual and visual aspects, and help the audience to construct cognition of the possible world. Based on the unnatural narrative of films, this study discusses the audio-visual focus and cognitive focus in unnatural films from the aspects of content and form, and explores how the audience constructs the cognitive logic of the impossible story world through the unnatural form.

2. The unnatural content and form of film narration

2.1 The unnatural content and form of the film

Based on schema theory, Stockwell pointed out that schemas can be divided into three categories in literary research: world schema, discourse schema and language schema. The world schema includes the schema related to the content of the work; Discourse schema refers to whether the world schema is presented to us in the order and structure we expect; Language schema refers to whether an object is described according to the expected language pattern and language style when it appears; *If schema disruption occurs in the latter two schemas, it will destroy our expected discourse structure and stylistic structure, which is called discourse deviation.*^[1] As a genre of narrative literature, there are also three schemas in film. The unnaturalness of film narration can be reflected through the “defamiliarization” discourse schema and language schema with the nature of “anti-imitation” to construct the “impossible” world schema of film narration. We can also say that in the unnatural film narration, the unnatural content of the narrative is presented through the world schema, which is manifested as the “impossible” story world; The unnaturalness of narrative form is represented by schematic interference in discourse schema and language schema, that is, filmic discourse deviation.

2.2 Focus and the content and form of the film

Gaudreault and Jost use the term “visual focus” to denote the relationship between what the camera shows and what is perceived to be seen by the character, while using the term “focus” to denote the

cognitive focus taken by the narrative. Visual focus achieves narrative purpose by constructing narrative time and space, while auditory focus achieves narrative effect by evoking emotional resonance similar to a certain story. Different from the monomodal static narration of literary works, film, as a dynamic and multi-modal narrative medium, organically combines audio-visual focus, enabling the audience to judge and identify with what the characters hear and see, and then participate in the construction of the audience's cognitive focus. The way of focusing reflects the expression form of the film, and the purpose of focusing is to highlight the content and connotation of the film.

The choice of audio-visual focus determines the content of the audience's cognitive focus, so as to achieve the purpose of expressing the theme meaning. When the audio-visual form shows the characteristics of anti-imitation, the content of cognitive focus also shows the non-natural characteristics. From the perspective of visual focus, when the lens is in the eyes of an unnatural figure in the fictional world, this unnatural internal visual focus naturally leads the audience to focus their cognition on the impossible story world. From the perspective of the form of auditory focus, when the story characters who do not belong to the time and space of a certain picture speak, and are heard by the story characters, or even communicate with each other, this unnatural zero auditory focus also makes the audience's cognition in an impossible story world. The unnatural audio-visual focusing form guides the audience to judge and identify with the unnatural content, further promotes the audience's cognition of the impossible story world, and thus builds the logic of unnatural narrative.

3. Visual focus and cognitive focus

The film's visual focus concerns mainly, from what perspective, who is looking at how to look and see what the. Godreault and Jost further explain the subdivision basis of visual focus, establishing a connection between the scene presented by the picture, the audience's identification with the camera, and the audience's perception of their participation in the gaze of a character. The visual focus of a film plays a leading role in the narrative of a film, and the collaborative auditory focus constitutes a complete representation, which takes precedence over the cognitive focus of the audience.

The audience constructs the logical relationship to understand the film through the judgment and identification of the camera or the characters in the drama, and it is "cognitive focusing" that enables the audience to infer the plot content from a certain position. In film narration, there are parallel and misalignment of visual focus and cognitive focus. When the content presented by the film picture is at the same level as the cognitive logic required by the audience to understand the story, the visual focus is parallel with the audience's cognitive focus. When the content of the film picture is ahead or behind the cognitive logic needed to understand the story, the visual focus and cognitive focus are misaligned. When the director take constitute dislocation, the audience's cognitive needs according to the process of narration and reconstructed before and after contact. In unnatural film narration, non-linear time or time-space overlap and other unnatural time-space factors cause the audience's cognition cannot develop in a single line, and some visual focus is needed to stimulate the audience to reconstruct the story world.

3.1 Types of visual focus

In film narration, there are several types of visual focus: Internal visual focus refers to the formation of the lens in the fictional world of a character's eyes. Internal visual focus can be divided into primary internal visual focus and secondary internal visual focus. The first case of "internal visual focus" refers to the presence of a stationary or moving human body or an eye in the picture, which enables the viewer to identify whose perspective the picture is viewed from without resorting to context. This is to suggest a look, not necessarily to show the watching eye, and in order to do this, the picture is constructed as an indication, a sign. For example, the camera suggests to the audience the subjective viewpoint of the character in another position relative to the position of the object to be seen through shaking and other ways. Secondary internal visual focus means that the first lens indicates that someone is looking, and the second lens shows what he is looking at. The two lenses constitute secondary internal visual focus through connection. The primary internal visual focus does not need this connection, and it itself implies that the displayed picture belongs to a certain person. In addition, there are zero visual focus, divided into several situations: first, the camera is outside any character, take an unemphasized camera position, only show the scene and maximize people forget the camera itself, which is the most common practice of daily consumption of movies; Second, the positioning or movement of the camera can emphasize the autonomy of the narrator relative to the fictional story world, such as the long shot at the beginning of *Citizen Kane*; Third, the positioning of the camera goes beyond its narrative role and is used to show a

certain style chosen by the creator. External visual focus refers to the fact that the story characters of the film text are known more than the larger narrator. Visual focus plays a very important role in the film, helping the audience to better understand the theme and emotion of the film, and to participate deeply in the story of the film.

3.2 *Unnatural visual focus and cognitive focus*

Internal visual focus under natural narrative focuses on the eyes of a certain character in the fictional world. In unnatural narration, characters present various unnatural characteristics, such as: *a mixture of human and animal, dead characters, “robot-like” humans and “human-like” robots, deformed characters, multiple versions of the same character,*^[2] etc. Therefore, in the impossible story world, because of the unnatural character attached to the focus, visual focus itself also presents the characteristics of “anti-imitation”. Unnatural narnarology studies impossible characters, time, scenes and behaviors in terms of physical laws, accepted logic and human attributes from the two levels of story and discourse. When the lens is in the eyes of an unnatural figure in the world of impossible stories, its visual focus belongs to the impossible phenomena of human attributes. It’s an unnatural way of focusing.

In the film *Triangle*, Jess is constantly experiencing death and rebirth on the cruise ship, and different parts of the girl coexist in the same time and space. In the film *Horror Cruise*, Jess is constantly experiencing death and rebirth on the cruise ship, and different parts of the girl coexist in the same time and space. After a new round of boarding, the director adopted secondary internal visual focus to present the picture of Jess who boarded the ship in the previous round peeping at Jess who boarded the ship in the next round. After that, the director also adopted internal visual focus to present Jess’s perspective for many times. However, due to the unnatural property of Jess character itself -- different sub-entities of the same character, that is, there was more than one Jess on the cruise at the same time. Even if we focused on Jess alone, we could not determine which sub-entity it was. In the film, Jess also has a second level of unnatural attribute, that is, a dead character, which is revealed at the end of the film. From this perspective, the visual focus of a large part of the film is in the eyes of someone who has passed away, and this kind of vision is not the memory of the character, which obviously violates the laws of physics and accepted logic. It’s also a human impossibility.

When the narrative is limited to what the characters in the play may know, the audience views the content of the following film from the position of the characters, which largely determines the audience’s identification with the characters.

The director frames the audience in the vision of the heroine through the way of internal focus. From the audience’s point of view, it seems that the narrator of the film prys through the characters of the story, which draws the audience into the plot and leads them to see Jess herself in the next round from Jess’s perspective. This sudden visual impact changes the audience’s emotions from doubt to panic, challenging their existing cognition. And through this knowledge helps the audience construct impossible story worlds to achieve unexpected and engaging results.

Another case of unnatural visual focusing exists in zero visual focusing. Since the positioning and movement of the camera can emphasize the autonomy of the narrator relative to the fictional world,^[3] when the narrator is an unnatural element, the visual focus at this time will also show the characteristics of “anti-imitation”, such a focusing method violates the laws of physics and is an unnatural focusing method. In the movie *A dog’s purpose*, the narrator tells the story of the dog returning to its original owner after many rounds of reincarnation from the perspective of a dog. In this film, the use of internal visual focus enables the audience to place themselves in the perspective of a dog, which is conscious and even has its own thoughts. The process of the audience re-understanding the world from a new angle with the help of the dog’s perspective is also the process of the audience’s cognitive construction. Whether it is from the dog’s perspective, using the form of internal visual focus, or following the dog’s movement track to take the form of zero perspective focus, multiple forms of visual focus allow the audience to start from multiple angles, gradually accept the ideological change brought by the “impossible” narrator in cognition, so as to understand the subtle emotions between humans and dogs.

4. Auditory focus and cognitive focus

Auditory aggregation in film narration refers to the relationship between film sounds and what characters hear. Filmmakers consciously bring together a number of sound elements as a means to achieve a certain narrative effect. These sound elements can be music, dialogue, environmental sounds,

etc., through their combination and arrangement, create a specific auditory atmosphere to help the audience better understand the movie storyline and character emotions. Through these sound elements, the audience can deepen their understanding and judgment of the logical relationship of the film and further improve the cognitive construction of the impossible story world. The relationship between auditory focus and audience's cognitive focus is parallel and dislocated, which depends on the director's narrative technique and narrative form. When the meaning of the sound element does not float on the surface of the narrative, the auditory focus is misaligned with the audience's cognitive focus, and the focus is also needed to stimulate the audience to rebuild the story world.

4.1 Types of auditory focus

Auditory focus can be divided into zero auditory focus, primary internal auditory focus and secondary internal auditory focus.

Zero auditory focus refers to the voice of the story character that does not belong to the time and space of the picture, and the story character cannot be heard, which can be divided into speech, sound and music. Not belonging to the picture space-time is not the same as not belonging to the story space-time, but can belong to other space-time passages in the story space-time. Primary internal auditory focus refers to what the character hears when he or she is not actively listening; The inner monologue of the story character belongs to the primary inner auditory focus. At this time, if the story monologue is spoken by a large narrator and belongs to another subject who is different from the story space character at this time, it is zero auditory focus. Secondary internal auditory focus refers to the content of the story characters' active listening, and the signs of active listening need to be defined by visual information. External auditory focus is an indispensable "point" in film narration. For example, in the movie text, the story character answers the phone and keeps answering, and the other party's voice does not appear in the text, which will cause a common auditory focus outside the movie narrative.

As a very important narrative means, auditory aggregation helps the director to create a rich and colorful auditory experience, enhance the emotional expression and plot development of the film, and make the audience better understand the plot logic of the film story and the emotions of the characters.

4.2 Unnatural auditory focus and cognitive focus

In the natural narrative, the mixed sound narration of multiple time and space in the film text belongs to zero auditory focus, because only the big narrator can span several different time and space at the same time, and the story characters cannot transcend their own time and space. However, in unnatural narration, because all time and space may be endowed with unnatural nature, it is common for the story characters to transcend their own time and space. In this possible world, the characters come from multiple time and space, and the voices of the story characters who do not belong to the time and space of the picture can also be heard by the story characters. For example, the characters and voices of time and space A appear in time and space B and generate utterances or narration. This kind of auditory focusing method violates the logical criteria and is logically impossible, and belongs to the unnatural auditory focusing method. In the film *Twelve Monkeys*, scientists send prisoner James back to 1996 to investigate the source of the virus, but he mistakenly travels back to 1990 and sets off a chain reaction that ultimately fails to stop the virus from spreading. However, at the end of the film, another female doctor comes to the virus transmitter and talks to him, saying the words "I'm insurance." which makes the audience re-examine the entire film. This is not the sound that the virus is supposed to hear, but because the time travel breaks the rules of the linear flow of time in the real physical world, the unnatural space-time setting causes the story characters of different time and space to talk to each other.

This unnatural auditory focus constitutes an element of the cognitive construction of the audience. In the original plot, James failed to stop the spread of the virus, but when the female Doctor said "I'm insurance" at the end, the audience could re-realize that James' death was not the end, and the female Doctor went back to the past to obtain an insurance for the original virus through the help of James in the early stage. But as the ruler of the future world, her purpose is not to save humanity, but only to find a solution for humanity to return to the ground. This outcome also shows that no matter what means can be taken to change the fact that has happened. The unnatural auditory focus helps the audience to construct the logical relationship to understand the possible world of the fictional narrative of the film, so that the audience can make a judgment on the content and plot of the film, and understand the main theme of the film under the guidance of the director's focus.

Primary internal auditory focus involves what the character is not actively listening to, such as the

character's internal monologue. However, in the unnatural time and space setting of the film, there may be monologues of another subject belonging to the character of this story space, or the situation of the embodiment of his inner monologue occurs. This situation violates both the laws of physics and the accepted logic, is an unnatural form of focusing, and also constitutes an unnatural auditory focusing. In the movie "Black Swan", the incident of Nina killing "Black Swan" Lily in the dressing room is actually the result of her inner consciousness activities, in the actual development process of the event, the dressing room is only her own, Nina stabbed her own, all Lily's words, disputes and struggles in the killing process, are the embodiment of her inner monologue. This unnatural factor breaks the audience's cognition through the unnatural focusing form, echoes the death of Nina in the end, and depicts the tragic female image of Nina's tenacious struggle and pursuit of artistic perfection in the unnatural form.

Because auditory focus involves characters' voices, background music, voiceover and other auditory modes in movies, when characters have unnatural characteristics, the auditory focusing mode formed by their voices also presents unnatural characteristics. In the movie text, the story character answers the phone and keeps answering, but the other person's voice does not appear in the text, which causes a common auditory focus outside the movie narrative. However, if the voice of the other party comes from other time and space or the voice of the other party comes from the psychology of unnatural characters, animals, other objects, narrators or characters themselves, it belongs to the physical and logical impossibility of human attributes, which is an unnatural form of focusing.

Unnatural auditory focus is an element of the audience's cognitive construction of the impossible story world. It works synergistically with unnatural visual focus to assist the audience's cognitive construction from a multimodal perspective and make the impossible story world more vivid. Whether it is to create suspense or metaphor or irony, it deepens the audience's understanding of the main theme of the film.

5. Conclusion

In film narration, it is impossible for the construction of the story world not only to rely on the real physical world, but also to mix the director's creative intention and the audience's understanding of subjectivity. In the narrative process of unnatural film, audiovisual mode as the main ideographic track occupies an important position, and the application of unnatural audiovisual focusing form helps the audience to construct the cognition of the impossible story world. The audience's cognitive understanding of the fictional world is based on the physical reality of formal audio-visual, which makes the unnatural factors present in a more explicit way. The interpretation of the narrative mode of unnatural films is helpful to understand the unnatural factors and their expressive ways, and provides new strategies for the deconstruction and understanding of unnatural narrative texts.

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