An analysis of the Cinematic Camera Art of "Birdman"

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Abstract: Alessandro González Iñárritu brought an absurdist comedy film in 2014 that blended realism and magicalism to the extreme. Instead, the film, which has a lot of surrealistic elements, builds the main body of the script on a play within a play, namely, the stage adaptation of the collection of stories "What We Talk about When We Talk about Love" by Raymond Carver. The film Birdman, is an American black comedy-drama film released in 2014. This thesis will focus on analysing the use of the camera in Birdman by exploring visual styles, camera techniques and camera language in film, to reveal how the film expresses thematic ideas through images, and how to integrate visual elements with narrative content to create a strong empathy and emotional experience for the audience during the viewing process. Birdman film uses a lot of camera art language for effect. This thesis will analyse the lens aspect of this film.

Keywords: birdman, long-shot, film, art

1. Introduction

The advent of the long shot was considered "a revolution in film aesthetics". The long shots designed and used by the director in the film Birdman lasted a total of 103 minutes and made the audience feel as if they were there, it's like the whole film is in "one shot". Not only does it fulfil the requirement for spatial integrity, but it has also achieved the desired picture effect, the audience is transported into a real and textured world. Long shots are the hallmark of this film, accelerating the advancement of the plot and the story. The director has demonstrated what a "good film" really is.

2. Overview of Birdman's shot expressions

The film employs numerous long shots，and in many cases a pseudo-long shot to achieve the effect of one shot in the end. The cinematographer for this film was Emmanuel Lubezki, who had shot Gravity, but compared to the elegant, smooth and fluid shots in Gravity. Birdman's shots are significantly more athletic. Long shots with extensive use of hand-held photography follow the film's characters through small fitting rooms, cramped corridors and the bustling streets of New York City. Even in the dialogue scenes, the camera movement seems unwilling to stop, the camera rotates around the interlocutor in a very fast motion, or moving back and forth between close-ups and close-ups depicting characters, with few smooth moving shots. Almost all of the film's major scenes are indoors, and the cramped, dimly lit interiors add to the sense of bondage that frames the characters in a fixed setting. In today's technologically advanced age of cinema, it has become commonplace to achieve pseudo one-shot effects by relying on light blocking, fixed camera positions, and panning the camera to create edit points. Birdman, of course, uses these techniques, but the role of the long shot in this film is not only to demonstrate technique and formality, but also to create a "cinematic feel" through the camera and to convey the emotions of the characters.

In the film Birdman, director Iñárritu's use of light-hearted, absurd black humour and long, single-shot takes opens up a new kind of experimentation, bringing the audience a feast of emotionally delicate visual images. Clever scene scheduling and light colour design, in breathless moody camera movements, the present situation and pursuit of a man, the stage in and out of the play, and the dependence and emotion of the troupe members, are naturally and closely connected together. This is mutually reinforcing with the sound effects of the film. Watching Birdman, we won't forget the film's soundtrack - dense with jazz drums. From the beginning of the film, this drum beat rambles on like lines of dialogue in this film, and whenever there is a scene change in the film, or the camera pushes

and pulls, this drumming occurs, creating a chaotic, disorganised and even surreal experience[1]. The close coordination between the camera and the sound effects makes the whole film intuitively present an agitated atmosphere that becomes an immersive audio-visual experience.

The film's "insecurity" is not only related to the images, but also to the content of the script. Towards the end of the film, the protagonist Regan tells the story of suicide. He tries to walk towards the sea to drown himself, but escapes ashore in a state of disarray because of the pain of being stung by a jellyfish in the sea. What appears on the surface to be an absurd joke is actually a metaphorical reconstruction and breakdown of the spiritual dimension caused by Regan's inner conflict[2]. And the role of metaphor in the film is presented in a magicalist way by director Alessandro. We can see in the second half of the film when the protagonist, after a night of drunkenness on the streets of New York, actually flies between buildings like a birdman. What appears to be a desperate and "inspirational" moment in the face of a theatre performance can be interpreted as an extreme manifestation of Regan's mental breakdown. In reality, he may just be fantasising that he can fly like Birdman, and this fantasy reveals his deepest insecurities and desires.

The film Birdman, with its unique cinematography and sound effects, conveys the inner anxiety and struggle of the protagonist, Regan, as he faces a difficult situation in his career and life. Director Alessandro Iñárritu gives the film a rich allegory and space for reflection by digging deeper into the elements of reality and fantasy, rationality and impulse, surface and heart, making it a fascinating and thought-provoking work. The director and cinematographer chose long shots to use the audiovisual format to its limits, dissecting every detail into place before carefully assembling it so that the viewer falls into Birdman's trap, but it is by no means a film of despair, because at the end, Regan's daughter looks up at the sky with a big smile on her face, isn't it a wonderful salvation for a heart that dreams and yearns to be free, at the same time, it also makes the audience deeply appreciate that in life, it turns out that they are no more than a birdman.

3. Birdman uses long shots for perspective shifts

American cinematographer Bryan Brown, in his book Cinematography Techniques, mentions that the point of view of a film camera can be divided into three types: first-person point-of-view, or subjective point-of-view, third-person point-of-view, or objective point-of-view, second-person point-of-view, between first-person point-of-view and third-person point-of-view. In general, the point of view of the film camera and the narrative perspective of the film are closely related, by changing the point of view of the camera you can achieve a shift in narrative perspective.

Narrative perspective is crucial to a film's narrative, what perspective is chosen determines who tells the story，what kind of stories are told about which characters, it's even about the significance of the event, different perspectives will lead to different directions of development. The two perspectives commonly used in most films are the omniscient perspective and the restricted perspective. For the viewer, the change in the narrative perspective of the film leads to two very different storylines, such contrasts allow for a better viewing experience and aesthetic enjoyment for the audience. Omniscient perspective films seem to take an objective viewpoint, leading the viewer into a world that they subconsciously identify with, allowing them to be unconsciously influenced by the subjective manipulations of the omniscient perspective narrator. Restricted perspectives usually use the perspective set by the film to direct the viewer to what the film wants the viewer to receive and appreciate. Often times, the cinematographer's shots have to assist the film in completing the narrative, so the narrative perspective of the film is also affected by the cinematographer's camera position and angle of shooting. Before the advent of the digital era, due to the size of the camera, the cinematographer's choices of camera positions and changes were limited by the conditions, this also meant that the cameras of the time couldn't quite meet the demands of the creators in terms of shifting perspectives, thus the audience is also limited in the narrative perspectives they can view.

Digital technology breaks the limitations of traditional photography in terms of shooting angles, creating a strange and fascinating space-time effect. The liberation of the camera's point of view has also allowed the human imagination of space and time to flourish. With the advent of the digital age and the constant updating of equipment and advances in photographic technology, Access to footage has long since ceased to be limited to traditional camera shots. This greatly improves the limitations of the camera and allows the cinematographer to choose and experiment with a wider range of camera angles. On the other hand, film is actually an artistic technique that uses two-dimensional images to show space, digital long shots can show multiple spaces from multiple viewpoints, not only can it fully

reflect the subjective intentions of the photographer, but it can also constantly stimulate the imagination of the audience and enhance the sense of interactive participation. It can be said that the advanced technology of the digital era has opened up a new chapter for perspective shifting in long shots and created a whole new aesthetic space for long shots.

The biggest difference between digital long shots and traditional long shots is that, the former can be spliced together with multiple shots through digital technology to achieve the effect of presenting a continuous motion picture effect in front of the audience. At the same time, the digital virtual camera technology can achieve the freedom to change the perspective of shooting, which cannot be achieved by the traditional camera. The audience can see more perspectives in the film that are not possible in everyday life. In following the movement of the camera, you are free from the constraints of time and space, but you will not be lost because of the transition of time and space in the shot.

Lubezki, the cinematographer for Birdman, often placed his camera between two actors, moving from one to the other through the swing of the camera. In addition, Lubezki discovered while filming that when using a wide-angle lens for a long shot, it better puts the viewer in the character's place and feels the environment they are in. Lubezki argues that the cinematography in Birdman seeks a sense of elasticity, the freedom to switch between the objective perspective of the camera and the subjective perspective of a particular character. When the camera passes through the corridor, the image seems to be subjectively seen by Reagan, and when Reagan reaches his destination, the camera begins to switch to an objective view, at which point Reagan enters the frame and becomes the subject. Also, there's a long shot of Leo re-catching up with the brigade in the film The Wild Bunch, starting with Leo pointing his gun at the enemy, starting with Leo pointing his gun at the enemy, the camera shows the melee between Leo and the enemy by following the direction of travel of different people and the transition between different characters, this long shot tested the cameraman's ability to command the shot. Also, the scene setting of the characters in this shot is very complex, the shots show two opposing forces coming from all directions, plus, it's surrounded by trees and there's no environment to refer to, so it's easy for viewers to lose their sense of direction while watching. Lubezki handles the shootout with great clarity, using the direction of the fleeing men's escape as the direction of the shot, despite the fact that the shot is sometimes up and sometimes down in the process, the followers are changing, but the viewer is not disorientated during the perspective shift. Lubezki's handling of the free shifting of perspective maximises the audience's motivation to follow the shot and experience the film, when the perfect fusion of the camera's point of view and the audience's subjective point of view is accomplished, a strong sense of involvement and identification is created.

4. The use of digital technology in the shots of Birdman

Digital technology is widely used in film and television，Not only did it shake up Bazan's various theories on the aesthetics of cinema in history, but it also sent wave after wave of shockwaves through the long history of film and television development. In the 1990s, Hollywood made extensive use of this technique, and a series of films with new themes were released one after the other with great success. These films would not have been possible if they had been made before, because these great works had to be based on digital technology. Many professions even refer to it as the "post-film era". The essence of Bazan aesthetics is the idea of the real as an idea, where the real does not refer to a specific means or a specific thing. While Bazan believes that the process of making a film must be authentic, he is more interested in how real the work feels to the audience. So the work produced by digital technology is real, despite the elements of untruth in these authentic works. The element of unreality here refers to the fact that the landscapes and people in the work are not traditionally photographed, but are digitally created "artefacts". Although these "artefacts" are subjectively produced by the creator and are not the real landscapes and people around us, they do not affect the viewer's visual experience in any way, because they're so lifelike on screen, they're even more real than the real thing. Because they are not subjective, but are created by the creators through the landscape and characters of life through the digital technology art into the screen works, are based on the facts of the art creation. Truth is still the lifeblood of all art, the extensive use of digital technology in film and television works has only made theories related to film and television aesthetics more three-dimensional and better, it does not contradict Bazan's cinematic aesthetics, but on the contrary is complementary and mutually reinforcing. Even with the advent of digital technology, the lifeblood of cinema is still "reality", and the aesthetics of cinema will never change.

In order to ensure an accurate understanding of the film theories related to the addition of digital technology to film, and thus to ensure a more rational and extensive use of digital technology in film and television, it is necessary to strengthen the exploration of the field of video. Faced with this big era,

Lubezki realised that he needed to make a new attempt, so he started to use digital technology for cinematography, and Birdman is an excellent work using digital virtual photography. It could be argued that this shift in Lubezki's approach significantly subverts traditional ontological theories of cinema and more realistically demonstrates a new type of relationship between the elements of cinema in the digital age. At the same time, as a cinematographer, Lubezki began to learn more about new techniques and successfully solved the previous challenges of lighting in virtual photography. Re-established the importance of the cinematographer to the production of the film, at a time when the position of the cinematographer was gradually being neglected. On the other hand, although the virtual camera emerged as a new digital technology, but because it can fulfil all the possible characteristics of the shot, the idea in the cinematographer's head can be fully realised, in a way, therefore, the cinematographer regained control of the film, which is exactly what Lubezki inherited as a cinematographer with regard to traditional photographic techniques.

5. The realism of the shots in Birdman

Lubezki has always believed in the cinematic aesthetics of the visual reality of the cinema, and his dedication has given us one classic after another, which we can't tell you how wonderful it feels to watch as if we were there. It should be emphasised here that although he was a master of the digital long lens, he was strangely not a fan of this technique, and even showed a degree of resistance to it. When Lubezki received the script for Birdman, for example, he was particularly offended by the need for the play to be shot repeatedly in long shots. This antipathy arose not from the difficulties of production, or the need for a large investment of time and cost, but from a consideration of audience[3]. Lubezki believes that long shots in films are prone to aesthetic fatigue, leading to a loss of audience enthusiasm for the work, and facing a huge market crisis in terms of audience disenchantment. Lubezki's unique use of the long shot is also evident in another way, his understanding of the long shot breaks away from the traditional aesthetics of "documentary aesthetics" as proposed by Bazendi, he believes that film and television must be true to the images it captures, which is at its core. In order to achieve this effect, it is necessary to ensure that the recording process is not interrupted, which is supported by the long shot technology. It is also to ensure that the viewer gets a sense of immersion and a more wonderful cinema experience. For the audience to really get that feeling there must be a need for authenticity. But the reality in Lubezki's eyes has long been higher than the reality in Bazan's theory, and it may even be said that the former is more real than the latter. Take the scene from the film Birdman as an example, one of the classic moments in the film is when Reagan runs around naked. He couldn't make it to the stage for various reasons, and was forced to walk through a crowded Times Square in order to keep the show going. He had completely forgotten that he was naked, and was completely absorbed in his running. Along the way, he is constantly being identified and asked for autographs, and jeers and teasing are coming at him like crazy. But in the end, Reagan came back to the stage as he wanted to, and it was no longer possible to give him a chance to hesitate and finish the play with all his might. The audience seems to be able to feel the protagonist's changing emotions throughout the process, and all the episodes almost come together in one go. This shows Lubezki's mastery of the long shots. But in his long shots, one can't find a single trace of selling out, because for Lubezki, he was not simply highlighting this photographic technique, on the contrary, he wanted to use it flexibly to give the viewer the beautiful feeling of being there, that is to say, to let the viewer really get involved in his own work, which is the ultimate state of art.

6. Conclusions

In the Birdman film, the director used "pseudo-long shots". The formality of "one shot to the end" and the deeper meaning of the film's content were cleverly blended, and a unique masterpiece was born. It is a perfect fusion of technology and art, both of which complement each other and give the art of cinema its unique character.

References

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