

Analysis on the Director's Style and Traumatic Narration in Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk

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ABSTRACT

With the continuous development of technology, for the creation of film and television, the audience not only requires the director to innovate in the content of storytelling, but also differs from traditional works in shooting technology and narrative way. The author theory makes the director's personal style of the film increasingly prominent. More and more attention has been paid to the audio-visual language and narrative equipment of the scene. This paper takes Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk directed by Ang Lee as an example, and analyzes the way that director Ang Lee handles the visualization of narrative text of character trauma from the perspective of the author's film, and the visual experience and inner feelings that are different from those of traditional films brought to the audience by technical aesthetics. This paper holds that the director Ang Lee realizes the visual transformation between the characters' subconsciousness, memory and lyrical fantasy, and turns the core theme of the film from the apparent "anti war" to highlight the growth and choice of a young man after the war. The theme of "trauma" in the film shows the disappearance of time and the anxiety of space. This paper will provide a case for the practical analysis of the author theory, and help the academic circles to further discuss the director's style and trauma narrative.

Keywords: *Audio visual art, Traumatic experience, Author film, Ang Lee*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since Georges Canudo first referred to cinema in *The Birth of the Seventh Art* as a "comprehensive art that includes both 'static' art and 'moving' art, 'temporal' art and 'spatial' art, 'plastic' art and 'rhythmic' art" [1], the theory of authorship has gradually formed its systematic connotation in the continuous innovation of European avant-garde cinema. This trend was pushed to the top in the 1950s by the "film manualist" critics, led by François Truffaut, and gave rise to the New Wave movement in French cinema, which had a profound influence on subsequent film criticism and cinematography.

The core principle of authorship theory is to adhere to the director-centered principle, which holds that the real author of a film is not the producer, screenwriter, or star, nor the genre model of the film, but the director of the film. The emergence of this perspective has given cinema the same conceptual first authorship as literature, painting, and other art forms from a theoretical perspective [2]. The so-called "authorial cinema" was born out of this aesthetic concept that emphasizes the director's individuality. One of the main

arguments of the "film manual school" is that the focus of authorship theory is not on the body of filmmaking behind a director, but on whether the actual work has the director's "signature", i.e., whether the director's personal style is recognizable through the audiovisual language of scenes and narrative devices [3].

This criterion broke with the old Hollywood "big producer system" to the "independent production system", which is familiar as the advent of the new Hollywood era. It also allows people to pay attention to some subjects that are neglected by the big studio system, and films that are not industrialized, but have some personal and exploratory attempts.

As for the technical aesthetics of film, the article "The Ontology of Film Image" published in 1945 points out that the plastic art is fundamentally in pursuit of similar appearance, and the invention of photography fully meets this demand. Bazan's image ontology puts forward: "Photography has a unique similar category, which determines that it is different from painting and follows its own aesthetic principles. All art is based on human participation, and photography enjoys the privilege of not intervention" [4]. Bazan affirmed that the

aesthetic characteristics of cinematography lies in revealing the truth, and Eisenstein is pessimistic about the role of technical factors in the development of film art, but his theory of "complete film" has some implications for our understanding of the aesthetic characteristics of film technology [4]. The audiovisual law can be broadly divided into the "long shot theory school" and the "montage theory school". The former is a theory proposed by André Bazin that emphasizes the presentation of complete time and space and seeks to restore the objective world [5]. The latter is the theoretical system formed by a group of Soviet directors, mainly Sergei Eisenstein, through practice, emphasizing the establishment of a "1+1>2" image mode through editing [6], which was later widely used in Hollywood visual editing. The two different styles of filming and editing systems also create very different experiences for the narrative dimension of audiovisual art.

2. DIRECTOR ANG LEE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF AUTHOR THEORY

Director Ang Lee, as a New Hollywood filmmaker, used montage as the main feature, and supplemented it with some long shots to form a visual mechanism of "stillness in motion" [7].

As a master director in the Hollywood camp, many of Ang Lee's works have been regarded by critics as a model for author films. Ang Lee's films are mostly easy to understand and cautious. Many of Ang Lee's works are about revealing the beauty of human nature, and he can always capture the characteristics of the human mind to create movies. Everyone in the world, wherever he is, will be buried in a trivial daily life. There is no boundary division, no time division and background differences.

After the transformation, director Ang Lee also constantly tries to bring new audio-visual experience to the audience from the perspective of technical aesthetics. Ang Lee's films have always integrated Chinese and Western cultures. On the one hand, he is not a fifth- or sixth-generation mainland director who peddles a "fringe culture" of Chinese characteristics to gain the attention of international film critics. Li An is always telling a simple story. His early father trilogy (Pushing Hands, The Wedding Banquet, and Eat Drink Man Woman) were all humanistic at heart. With this, this humanistic concern is not based on any universal level at all, and there is no hole peeping into the heart in the sense of smallness in the era. Ang Lee never puts on the ugly face of a "defender" to make any criticism.

On the contrary, Ang Lee is more like a defender and promoter of traditional Chinese culture. Qigong in Pushing Hands, calligraphy in Wedding Banquet, Chinese cuisine in Eat Drink Man Woman, and martial

arts spirit in Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon; On the other hand, Ang Lee also has an authentic Western way of thinking, his Sense and Sensibility, The Ice Storm, Brokeback Mountain, and even this Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk are all inextricably alluding to a characteristic tragicomedy in Western family culture, and his image thinking is in tune with the Western public. That is to say, Ang Lee has a Chinese Confucianist's middle way in his heart, but has a unique sensual thinking in Western culture in the perception of things. In the reconciliation of Eastern and Western cultures, Ang Lee is like a Tai Chi master in a suit, not doing any "surpass foreigners by learning from them", but more like a kind of eastern learning and western integration.

The most eye-catching aspect of the production of Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk is undoubtedly the "3D, 4K, 120 fps", which has been described as the highest specification in the history of cinema, as noted by the famous film critic Roger Ebert [8]. The essence of cinema is not movement, but the choice between action and stillness [8]. The 120-frame motion picture itself and its pairing with the first-person viewing perspective make the viewer easily reminded of video games, thus better bringing in the hazy and dreamy sense of memories [8]. In Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk, director Ang Lee devotes himself to the psychoanalysis of the "hero" character, revealing the soft texture of their strength.

Director Ang Lee has been using a restrained and abbreviated narrative strategy to deviate from those narrative conventions that seek to complete the film. This narrative has a strong contrast with the traditional ending of the film, and director Ang Lee seems to be using these different endings to express his intention, that is, the high technology of the film is only the means of expression of his film, not to meet the audience's expectations. In the depth of his lyricism, we also seem to be able to see the delicacy and knowledge of Ang Lee in his audio-visual grammar and line expressions. And these care and compassion for human emotions are the core of Ang Lee's long-standing authorial philosophy.

3. TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE AND VISUAL EXPRESSION IN BILLY LYNN'S LONG HALFTIME WALK

As early as 1870s, because Martin Schalk confirmed that pathological hysteria was psychogenic, people's general pathological concept was changed, and they began to realize physiological diseases or psychological trauma. Martin Schalk devoted all his academic prestige to support the authenticity and objectivity of hysteria and was celebrated by Freud as the patron saint of emancipation from suffering [9]. In the film, Billy Lynn experienced the war and witnessed the death of his teammates, he did not appear hysterical, but still did not

come out of the war brought him tension and depression of the psyche. The sense of unreality in the outside world and the self-protective function of the psyche will still be displayed uncontrollably when he is dazed and distracted.

Freud considered trauma as an experience. It is an experience in which a person's mind is stimulated for a very short period of time with such intensity that the mind cannot seek to adapt in the normal way, thus permanently disrupting the effective functioning of the mind. Trauma has a delayed experiential nature. In *Mourning and Depression*, Freud argues that after trauma, the subject experiences two possible psychological responses, mourning or depression: "The traumatized mourning subject goes through a period of grief and transfers love from the lost object to the new object, successfully achieving empathy. The traumatized depressed subject, however, refuses to acknowledge the loss of the object of love, refuses to restore a normal identity relationship with the external reality, falls into long periods of psychological emotions such as self-blame, depression, and indifference, and rejects or even refuses to empathize" [10].

In *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, director Ang Lee shows us the B class of U.S. soldiers in Iraq who rescued their comrades. Billy Lynn was hailed as a hero by his countrymen because of an unintentionally recorded image, and thus returned home with his comrades to participate in a halftime show of a football game. The film used a lot of interpolations in order to present the audience with an expression that was as close to Billy Lynn's psychological activity as possible, similar to the way stream-of-consciousness films were edited. Because the film involves the interpolation of 3 spaces, the number of times each space-time appears is enumerated here.

Table 1 Number of different scenes in the film

Space location	Number of occurrences
Battlefield and Combat zone	11
Billy's Home	6
Stadium (film main time and space)	15
Billy's fantasy	2

On the day of participating in the midfield performance, meet the crowd in the real world and attend the press conference. A few days ago when he

came home, he had a conversation with his family. Memories of life on the battlefield in Iraq and the scene of the war, a triple time and space throughout Billy Lynn's day, in the constant plunge into memory, the audience also peeled back the so-called "hero" disguise, a young man less than 20 years old in the face of the bloody battlefield of helplessness, post-war stress trauma, the demands of the world on him under the filter of hero.

There is a line in the film that says, it's strange that everyone praises your worst day. On the court, people ask, how can you have the courage to make heroic feats? Billy can only keep silent when asking such questions. He can't answer the questions raised by people who are not present at all but think they know well.

Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk is filled with a loneliness, a lack of understanding. The crowd on the field tapped him on the shoulder and told him. We are fighting with you on a different battlefield. The pretty cheerleader said when she saw Billy hesitate. How can you stay? Heroes should be on the battlefield [11]. The incomprehension of those around him and the silence of Billy Lynn. He recalls the look in the eyes of Iraqi children in the war zone when they look at him from afar when he sees a taxidermy cow's head in a restaurant, and the sound of fireworks exploding on a football field when he hears Iraqi soldiers being blown up into pink smoke on the battlefield. After a series of post-war stress traumas and his family's desire to keep him in the United States for safety reasons, Billy Lynn finally finds himself unable to live a normal life like other 20-year-olds, amidst hesitation and reality.

At the end of the film, Billy Lynn is still on the bus back to the battlefield. "Take us back to safety," said his comrade, looking at the crowd on the field. Billy Lynn is also finally relieved. His comrades are his family, the battlefield is his home, the bland daily life can never return. In the sad mood gradually calm, B class soldiers returned to the battlefield. Heroes return only to the battlefield. They no longer belong to peace. All the characters in the movie, except the soldiers, almost all dissolve in the word hero.

From the movie agent, the court manager, to Lynn's sister, to the cheerleader girl, the Lynn they see is not in the same world as themselves from the beginning of the fight, so all the feelings generated on this basis can only end in the real world. The film continued Ang Lee's consistent goodwill and uneasiness, and at last it was full of sadness. Truth or lie cannot summarize the world. Cruelty and warmth coexist, and care and loneliness coexist.

Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk cleverly transforms the battlefield that originally brought Billy PTSD into the "home" at the end. After being traumatized on the battlefield, Billy returned to the

crowd, originally thinking he would get the peace he wanted but could never integrate into society, and eventually found that the ones who understood him best were his comrades who were on the battlefield together.

However, whether you choose to transfer the trauma or redefine the object that brings the trauma, the traumatic experience will be permanently printed in your personal memory like a scar, reminding and suggesting our past. Due to the irreversibility of time, it is almost impossible to completely repair the trauma experienced by human beings. Therefore, when Billy chose to return to the battlefield, the car in front of him became a tank on the battlefield, and his dead teammates appeared in the car again. The film ended with sad and light music, just like the inevitable common destiny and ultimate tragedy of mankind.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the author's theory, this paper discusses the film *Billy Lynn's Halftime War* directed by Ang Lee through the method of text analysis. There is no doubt that Lee's "Billy Lynn's Halftime War" seems to be a technical victim, or an experiment.

What a high concept technology 120 frames is, and what is the point of a technology that almost breaks the gap between people and the screen: just to satisfy the audience's peeping, or simply for technical attempts. However, the so-called reality under the 120-frame high concept is a "visual lie", and its "too close" is a distance in itself. The temperature of Billy Lynn itself is not so naked from that respectful distance. After all, a movie is just a movie, its naked in front of our life, is more like a kind of improper selling. Donatore's Paradise Cinema says: Life is not a movie. It's far harder than movies. I don't deny Lee's pursuit of 120 frames in Billy Lynn's midfield war, but I don't praise it.

In recent years, mostly starting with *Make Woodstock*, Lee's usual on-screen gentleness seems to have been burned out by his ambition to twist his shooting skills. Of course, Lee is improving, and technically, Billy Lynn is almost reduced to madness. Just about Lee's ability to tell stories. What is the technological innovation of Billy Lynn compared to his old work? Perhaps, it has reached some ideal height. Lee began to no longer be content to mediating circles in Chinese and Western cultures, so he began to reach for the shooting technology and the way of watching movies.

If Ang Lee's previous films serve culture, art and culture, then recent works are more like technical service. *Billy Lynn's Halftime War* is in a sense a milestone in film technology. It's just that the 120 frames in Billy Lynn is more of a gimmick, or a means of publicity, and the so-called technical means often ignore the neglect of the film. With this Billy Lynn, 120 frames

may bring the audience closer to the fictional reality, but the emotional resonance is far from the 120 frames.

Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk is a very literary approach to psychological drama. The parallel editing goes with Lynn's reaction to the scene. You don't know what the next scene is, and you don't know where the main character is in the next scene, and that's what Ang Lee is good at. As opposed to technology, what the audience sees is still the same old Ang Lee who is keen on details. Each interlude is linked by details, allowing the audience to enter directly into the psychological level of the protagonist and visualize the flow and changes of his thoughts.

Director Ang Lee's visual switch between the characters' subconscious, memories, and fantasies of lyrical thoughts. In front is the joy of all people, while behind is the sadness of life and death on the battlefield. When really immersed in the story, it is not difficult to find that the core of the film is not anti-war, but a young man's growth and choices after experiencing war. In analyzing the trauma narrative in Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk, this paper attempts to explore the narrative path of the text, combined with psychoanalysis, to find out that the theme of "trauma" in the film is narratively represented as the fading of time and the anxiety of space.

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