

# Practice of Deleuze's Film Theory

## Evaluation and Analysis on the American Film Adaptation

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**Abstract**—Adaptation, a film with Nicolas Cage acting the leading role and Spike Jonze as the director, carries off abundant prizes upon being released. This paper takes this film as an example and discusses Gilles Deleuze's film philosophy from three levels: time, latency and presentation. In the film, "time" keeps a possibility of openness and divarication and it is called "non-sequential time" by Deleuze. The philosophy of time in film makes us pay attention to the status of and changes in life itself. Adaptation is a generative presentation film, trying to tell us perception, emotion, memory and imagination in the generative and changing world and "what the world might be". Thereout, images are seen as the "body" of spirit and thought, which lies Deleuze's philosophical meaning of time and images.

**Keywords**—Deleuze; film theory; time; latency; presentation

### I. INTRODUCTION

Gilles Deleuze is a philosopher of French post-structuralism and his philosophical thought is difficult to understand. He has two classic works: *Film One: Movement—Images* (1986) and *Film Two: Time—Images* (1989), which can be regarded as the response of Deleuze's philosophical thoughts to film. In his film theory, Deleuze divides film images into two types: classic film images and modern film images. The former consists of movement—images and the latter consists of time images. Deleuze's film theory constructs a new philosophical world in an open and mobile way. Adaptation selected for this paper is a film directed by Spike Jonze, telling the story of Charlie, a pessimistic and frustrated scriptwriter preparing to rearrange a novel named *The Orchid Thief*. The novel is written by Oulin, a reporter of *New York Times*. The novel is based on her interview with John, an orchid planter, and his experiences. Oulin expresses the feeling about orchid in this novel, which touches Charlie, the scriptwriter. Charlie hopes to break through the traditional narration of Hollywood and rearrange the novel into a plain film conforming to the original life. But, as it turns out, the rearrangement process is extremely arduous and even Charlie himself is caught in the story he rearranges. After shown in 2002, the film obtains the nomination for best actor and best adaptation on the 75th Oscar Academy Awards, Grand Jury Prize on the 53th Berlin International Film Festival, and multiple nominations for best director, best scriptwriter, best music etc. of the 60th Golden Globes USA. It is also rated as one of the best ten movies in 2002 by American Film Institute. This paper takes this film as an example and discusses

Deleuze's film philosophy from three levels: time, latency and presentation.

### II. TIME—IMAGES

Time in adaptation consists of paralleling, breakage and mixture. First, realism time-space: take Charlie rearranging *The Orchid Thief* as the narrative structure line. Second, past time-space: Five years ago, John, the orchid thief, cultivates the rare and precious ghost orchid. Three years ago, Oulin, a female reporter, investigates and writes *The Orchid Thief*, a novel. Third, fantasy time-space: At the beginning of the film, there is origin and transition of species, Charlie lying on the bed with sexual fantasy and his final tracing of Oulin at the end, and Charlie entering into the story. These three time-spaces interlace and merge together, full of absurdness and chaos. With time-space setting, this film advertises an anti-classic and dramatic route. Due to diversified conflicts setting in classic narration, like drug dealing, sex and car accident, its acting power is exciting and brutal. Therefore, the time led by actions must be accompanied by meticulous setting and coherent space and pre-set plot. However, Charlie pays attention to time in daily life and material environment. He hopes to show the natural state of an orchid rather than the power brought by gun fight and love. He wants to show the still time, feeling and power contained in the flower. People's daily life is not full of extreme emotions, but is loosened and scattered.[1] Therefore, in the film, time becomes the important power and it is no longer the pre-set orderly time, but a kind of broken, blurred and mixed time. With development of the scene, among the multiple time cycle of present, past and future, space is not fixed but random. Therefore, space in the film is in a intersecting and mixed stated. People's behavior is also in a disrupted state. There is interruption from time-to-space conversion, like Oulin's interview and writing process. There is also interruption from trivial things in life, like Charlie's writing and fantasy on the bed are constantly interrupted by Donald, his twinborn younger brother. This kind of time separation contains a desolate and helpless sense. Those people born in the split "time-space" and the "fault block" thing and world carried by them and people in the current time-space "form an adjacent and undistinguishable region". [2] Facing this kind of scattered, disorderly and non-preset daily life, people don't know how to make a decision. People in the scene become a fantast rather than an actor. Therefore, in life, Charlie

is always hesitating, cowardly, and fantasizing, knowing nowhere to begin.

In his paintings, like Freudian Portrait, Screaming Pope and Henry Jerome Morales's Portrait, Francis Bacon, a painter of Ireland, creates twisting of physical organs. Although the body in the painting is still, he draws up the speed of and changes in movement, namely the time. The film uses intersecting and mixed time-space to form a kind of complex spiritual movement. Like Bacon's creation of twisted organs in the painting, the film adopts the twisted time. It rebels against the intentional arrangement of classic narration and expands towards different time dimensions. All these expansions surround *The Orchid Thief*, which records the original story. In the original story, we see the past, the generating present and the future with multiple possibilities in film plot. *The Orchid Thief* becomes "a thing like time displayer".[3] It makes eternal diversion of time in the film visible to people. Deleuze calls this kind of "aggregation" relation as "non-sequential time". In the film, it is exactly this kind of "time" keeping the possibility of divarication and openness. It draws our attention to the state of and changes in life itself rather than the plot conflict.

### III. LATENCY—IMAGES

In classic narration, what the audience see is not the entire images, but the stipulated images that the maker wants us to see. Take *Battleship Potemkin* as an example, a famous film in world film history. Eisenstein, the director, repeats again and again from different perspectives and different fields of shooting scale and forces us to pay attention to things happening on "Odessa stairs". However, in Deleuze's "latent image" film theory, the audience's eyes are not limited to people's movement and the plot's wonderful development direction, but focus on the situation and state of people. It contains the relation between reality and latency, body and heart, truth and fantasy, and objectivity and subjectivity and it also appears in French new tides and the post modern films, like the memory, recollection and dreamlike "pure seeing and hearing images" in films of Alain Resnais, Fellini, and Michelangelo Antonioni.

In *Adaptation*, the leading character has conflicts with McKee, reversing the classic story theory with dramatic conflict of McKee. It shows that the film itself is non-traditional Hollywood classic narration, emphasizing the thing itself and "latent images" which was about to happen and will happen. Therefore, situation and state of people shown in the film exceed the story's original scattered and disorderly plot, like Charlie's dull and impersonal watching, absent wandering and great anxiety over where to begin his writing in the room on the filming site at the beginning, and like his dreaming and fantasizing on the bed and his muttering to himself facing the picture of Oulin on the cover and so on. In this series of scattered and disorderly situations with dream words, float the emotion and power. It emancipates the audience's eyes and achieves the so-called "foreseeing function" of Deleuze: It sees both the visible and invisible things. It makes us see the time and spirit rather than superficial movement of images. "Obtain a dreamlike relation through unrestrained sensual organs".[4]

In addition, in *Adaptation*, Charlie, the leading role, has a twinborn younger brother named Donald, who lives in the same house with Charlie all the time. The actor himself is the divarication of reality and latency. When the role's latent images become more real and clearer, the actor's real images will become dimmer and darker, vice versa.[5] Therefore, we can even presume that Donald, the twinborn younger brother, is "latent". Generation of this role comes from Charlie's fantasy. Later on, the younger brother dies in a car accident. "The dead person's latent survival can also become a kind of latency and reality".[6] Therefore, in the film, although the optimistic and active younger brother dies, Charlie is not clumsy and cowardly any more. When Charlie drives towards a distant place confidently, it seems that the younger brother's active attitude towards life is inherited by Charlie. Just like the "cycle of reality and latency" proposed by Deleuze, in the mirroring reflective crystal, the audience get lost in the dreamlike giant maze with high praise on the complex space and endless confusion and thinking.

### IV. PRESENTATION—IMAGES

Before World War Two, classic film is mainly about "super experimental representation of images",[7] trying to tell us "what the world is". The process of "representation" is similar to Nietzsche's metaphor: We hide a truth behind the grove and then we find it back. In this process, our beginning and end is about the same preset object. Therefore, the searching in Nietzsche's metaphor is extremely similar to the pattern of treasure snatching film and road film in traditional images: It seems that all people pay attention to the location of treasure and the end of the journey. The end point is also the starting point we search for, and they are the "same" thing and they are pre-set. *Adaptation* can be called a generative presentation image of modern film. Charlie, the leading role, describes his plan of adaptation, "I want the film to come into being naturally rather than setting the framework and using artificial layout". Therefore, the film tries to walk out of "representation" and abandons gun fight, sex love, car accident and other classic dramatic plots. Instead, it focuses on "presentation", searches for the orchid hidden in waste woods and moors, creates a state of encounter and records perception, movement, emotion, desire, memory and imagination of every moment in the "encounter" process, which are the most important. All these unknown conversions endow the images with a peculiarity of "presentation". Its oriented action is no longer the preset truth behind the tree or revelation of secrets in the world, but trying to tell us "what the world might be". Just as Deleuze says, artistic creators have nothing to copy or imitate, and they can only show their perception, emotion, memory and imagination of the change generative world. When artistic appreciators appreciate, the things they feel are the above things as well.

When Charlie deepens his understanding of the world, he abandons his muddleheaded past and drives towards the future confidently. Background scenery of the scene is lines of growing plants in various postures with time-lapse photography. It seems to return to the beginning of the film, namely biological adaption, revolution and changes in Darwinian evolution. It also implies Charlie's revolution and adaption----When experiencing tracking, gun fight and car

accident, there are some images obeying the Hollywood tradition. Are the two biological circulations the beginning or the end of the film? Does the story of searching for the orchid really exist? Is tracking Oulin together with his younger brother real or just Charlie's fantasy? Will the final script develop in the way Charlie presets? Adaptation truly has no definition of truth and no preset and corresponding things for imitation. It only has endless generative movement---biological origin, revolution of human and the "adaptation" of Charlie himself. Bergeson thinks that a conscious life exists "in change which lies in getting mature and constant self creation".[8] This kind of adaption is original creation. Baruch de Spinoza, a philosopher of the Netherlands, says, "Because I once was a youth, a maid, a clump of bushes, a bird, and a silent fish in the ocean.....".[9] Image generation and story construction of the whole Adaptation seem to be similar to the process from "youth" to "fish", and from muddleheaded Charlie at the beginning of the film to the orchid in the sunshine and other traversing and adaption movement at the end of the movie. It can even be said that "ghost orchid", the kind of plant, becomes a medium in the film. Charlie re-recognizes himself and knows about the whole world through this kind of rare orchid plant. It is exactly the power of "presentation". The world brightens itself and our understanding of the world can only return to material and objects, tracing the power of world generation.

## V. CONCLUSION

When looking back on the infant development of film, in the viewpoint of Lumiere brothers and Edison, due to the dividing line of technology, the visual media technology develops into two consumption modes: independent watching and street consumption with "raree show" as the axis and share based amusement park consumption with projector as the axis. Based on the fact that amusement park has more profit margin than street, film is unified under the flag of collective watching finally. Therefore, the public of capitalism obtain the cheapest visual delicacies.[10] Later on, with the logic catering to commodity consumption, Hollywood's classic narrative grammar gradually occupies the world's silver screen. Linear time, continuity editing and type narrative construct the smooth film watching experience for the audience. However, bitter experience of life and spiritual introspection brought by World War Two bring about a series of film art thoughts and schools, like French "New Wave" and German new film. In the European artistic film, classic narrative film develops towards modern film. Deep excavation into people's internal spirit and presentation of "pure seeing and hearing images" give films the power to get rid of the pure representation of material world. Since then, film is no longer just the object of watching and images truly become the stage of mental operations. It skips over the definition of objects and describes their generative movement, trying to tell us "What the world might be" rather than "What the world is". Adaptation not only shows the generation process of a script, but also conducts tracing and continuous rebellion under the structure of sets of layers around the text of a film story. At this time, the reflexive story becomes the medium and Charlie's perception, emotion, memory and imagination in generative changes of the script become the emphasis. These "latent images" endow images with a kind of "presentation" feature, bringing endless thinking

and interpretation to people. "Film creators should be poets admitting differences and putting into words in the name of creating power".[11] It is also the free film and creative film that Deleuze's film theory wants to express.

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