

Silence and Blank: Analysis of Sound Narrative Strategies in Chinese Art Films

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the unique narrative characteristics of Chinese art films exhibited in the application of silence and blank. Different from traditional sound processing, Chinese art films deeply reveal the psychological state, spatial sense and emotional tension of characters through the unique arrangements of silent scenes, ambient sounds, voice weakening and sound blank, so that the audience can rethink the narrative power of images in the audio-visual silence. The research shows that the sound processing in Chinese art films can further enhance the openness and metaphorical meaning of films through the absence or blurring of sound. This paper focuses on the existence and absence of sound and analyzes the profound influence of these strategies on film narration, which provides a new perspective for understanding the sound aesthetics of Chinese art films.

KEYWORDS

silence; blank; sound narration; Chinese art film

In film narration, sound influences the plot transmission and emotional arousal in a unique way. By deliberately weakening or even erasing the sound, silence and blank reveal the hidden fluctuations in the characters' inner feelings, the hidden surge of emotional tension and the layers of subtlety of the situation, which not only expand the expression dimension of film language, but also reflect the subtlety and profundity of Chinese culture. Through the subtle perception aroused by the presence and absence of sound in the hearts of the audience, the sound narrative strategies profoundly enhance the narrative charm of Chinese art films and makes them show a unique artistic expression.

1 Highlight the Character's Inner Conflict and Emotional Tension, and Create the Emotional Resonance of the Audience through Silent Scenes

In Chinese art films, silent scenes present a extremely profound narrative intention. The director uses this technique to separate the audience from the conventional audio-visual perception, place them in the subjective world of the characters, and make them produce direct emotional resonance with the visual images. In the silent setting, the director often deliberately removes the background sound and dialogue, enlarges the visual focus, and calmly looks straight into the character's heart. In this construction, the gradual weakening of sound makes the audience approach the emotional core of the character step by step, as if they are led into a psychological space that is quiet but full of tension.

The director also enriches the emotional density of silent moments with subtle variations of light

and shadow. The contrast of strong and weak light and the alternation of warm and cold hues all suggest the emotional fluctuations of the characters, and make the audience feel a silent emotional atmosphere in the interweaving of light and shadow. The deepening of the shadow and the cooling of the hue strengthen the oppression of the image in silence, and accentuate the loneliness of the characters to the extreme, and the audience seems to touch the silent tension surrounded by the shadows^[1].

In the use of long shots, silent scenes also gain the benefit of immersion. The long stare and slow moving camera make the pace of editing almost stop, and the audience's eyes are fixed in the image. They gradually experience the inner monologue of the character in the static field of view. Especially when the characters are alone, the combination of silence and long shots constitutes a narrative structure with a strong sense of immersion, and the audience's observation gradually evolves into an emotional experience that resonates with the emotions of the characters.

The use of silence in the design of the space also adds layers to this atmosphere. The director creates an oppressive tension through the silent treatment in the enclosed space. In the silent closed space, the remaining visual composition and details are infinitely enlarged, and the withdrawal of environmental sound compresses the sense of space to a suffocating degree. The audience can only rely on visual sense to interpret emotional undercurrents. Therefore, a high-concentration atmosphere of emotions is created, and the emotional power that is difficult to ignore is condensed in the silence.

2 Increase the Sense of Space and Reality and Deepen the Social and Natural Atmosphere of the Character by Using Ambient Sound

In Chinese art films, ambient sound often can break through the level of scene supplement and becomes an accurate description of the character's environment and situation. By finely adjusting the level of ambient sound, the director spreads the sense of space layer by layer, and gives the character's surrounding environment a concrete sense of existence. Small sounds, such as wind blowing through the leaves and water flowing, are often amplified in silence to create an intermittent sound rhythm. These tiny sounds are not constant, but intermittent with the context, which make the space be presented in a real texture, and the audience unconsciously capture the unique rhythm of the character's environment.

The layering of ambient sounds also often suggests the relationship characters and their surroundings. In the scene of the anxious character, the distant noise is suddenly amplified to create an invisible pressure. It is not a simple sound effect, but the gradual disclosure of the hidden depth of space and the fluctuating process of externalizing characters' emotions in ambient sound. By positioning different sound sources, such as distant sound of vehicles and faint conversations, and placing sound sources outside the screen, the director can break through the visual framework and extend a hidden space, which allows hearing to extend beyond the image, and creates a three-dimensional sense of sound and scene permeating each other.

In terms of emotional rendering, the weakening treatment of ambient sound has a unique effect. At the moment when the character steps from the noise into the inner monologue, the ambient sound is gradually weakened, and the audience enters the inner space of the character from outside the visual focus^[2]. Such a gradual decline of sound leads the audience to perceive the inner loneliness of the character. And at this moment, the ambient sound is no longer a background sound, but becomes a low-key means of conveying the emotional atmosphere. The gradual attenuation of the volume is like the detachment of emotion, and gradually leads the audience into the deep psychological state of the character.

3 Dilute the Human Voice in a Specific Situation, and Guide the Audience to Pay Attention to the Delicate Expressions and Body Movements through the Communication Function of Visual Language

In terms of human voice processing, Chinese art films often deliberately highlight the power of visual level by blurring dialogue or reducing volume. When a director conceives a scene, the dialogue is often placed at a low volume or far away, so that the dialogue becomes only a link in the background, rather than the core of the plot. The weakening of the human voice is transformed into a silent guide that focuses the viewer's attention on the character's body language, subtle facial changes, and subtle emotional fluctuations.

For example, in a dialogue full of emotional tension, the volume of the dialogue is deliberately reduced, and the audience cannot hear it clearly, but through the interaction of the eyes and expressions of the characters, the emotion flows in the silence, which makes the visual information become the main medium of emotion.

In the construction of group scenes, the director is more inclined to use the technique of overlapping sound effects. The interweaving of multiple voices makes it difficult to distinguish a single dialogue, so the audience is surrounded by the chaos of sound, unable to grasp a single sentence, and can only experience the dynamics of the interaction between groups. This overlapping strategy gives the dialogue a vague sense of hierarchy, so the dominance of the human voice fades, and the emotion permeates the noisy soundscape. In this way, the human voice becomes the dark line of the atmosphere, and a support for the visual expression, so that the audience can comprehend the complex relationship within the scene in the obscurity of the voice.

In particular situations, the use of low-frequency human voice can create a special psychological atmosphere^[3]. The transmission of dialogue in the low-frequency sound effect loses the conventional semantic clarity and makes the sound texture dull and fuzzy, and the emotion is slowly permeated. At the moment of self-reflection of the character, the human voice in the low-frequency sound effects strips away the direct semantic level and gives the audience a sense of emotional touch. The heavy tone allows the audience to detect internal fluctuations in the tone and intonation of the dialogue. Low-frequency human voice is not only a kind of sound regulation, but also an undercurrent of emotion.

4 Break the Audio-visual Conventions and Strengthen the Uniqueness of Narrative and the Uncertainty of Plot through the Abruptness or Absence of Sound

In the sound narration of Chinese art films, the abruptness and disappearance of sound constitute a kind of audio-visual strategy that breaks the convention. Through the instant sound withdrawal or a sudden sound, the director makes the audience's senses seem to encounter an unexpected jump, and creates a sense of alienation and unfamiliarity. When the key emotions rise or turn, the director suddenly cuts off the background sound, dialogue, and ambient sound, and the audience is placed in a sudden silent atmosphere. This silence is like a break point in the plot, consciously interrupts the audience's auditory inertia, and makes them re-examine the blank in the image, and re-think the hidden emotions and hints in the silence.

Directors often choose to make abrupt sound changes at the turning point of the plot, such as sudden silence, or reducing the noisy sound effect to zero in an instant. This auditory mutation creates discomfort, and forces the audience's attention back to the visual sense, and on the character's eyes, micro-expressions, and body gestures. This kind of narrative intensification in silence guides the audience to experience the depth of emotion in silence, feel the silent emotional

waves through the image, and is stimulated the deep resonance of the atmosphere of the image through the exquisite camera shift and the quiet rendering of the environmental texture.

The sudden sound effect after the silence continues is also cleverly used to form a kind of regression “awakening” of sound^[4]. This abrupt sound effect is usually played in times of crises or emotional conflicts to break the silence and stimulate an internal emotional leap. The sudden sound seems to be a deliberate destruction of the calm, which allows the audience to enter the strong audio-visual impact after a short sense of security, and intuitively feel the shock and transition of the character’s heart. At this moment, the sound becomes the rhythmic breakthrough of the plot progress, and guides the audience to perceive the uncertainty in the narrative in the instantaneous changes of the sound effect, so that the contingency and tension are amplified in the contrast between the image and the audio.

5 Enhance the Tension between the Image and the Sound and Stimulate the Audience’s Open Interpretation of the Situation by Using the Blank

As a deliberate omission, the sound blank makes the image stimulate the active participation of the audience in the silent state. The director creates an imaginary space by pulling out or selectively leaving the sound blank to make the silence like a “blank canvas”, so that the audience can extend the understanding of the connotation of the image in silence. This technique often occurs when the audience expects a sound response, but the director chooses to remain silent, and use “silence” to build layers of emotion and tension. By cutting out unnecessary sound effects or dialogues, the audience is given room to fill the silent space, and the narrative becomes more open.

In the use of blank, the director often weakens the spatial sound effect to make the whole scene fall into silence, and the audience can only catch the subtle situation suggestion by sight. In silence, the director may retain almost imperceptible faint ambient sound in the background to make the audience feel the absence of sound and then focus on the visual details of the image^[5]. The weak ambient sound not only maintains the sense of reality of the space, but also provides an experience of self-exploration for the audience in the silent state, as if they enter a quiet but suggestive situation.

In some scenes, the sound blank is also reflected in the absence of dialogues. The director replaces language with eye contact and subtle movements, and makes the characters’ emotions flow silently. The omission of dialogues turns the audience’s attention from the language to the silent emotional fluctuations, and the wordless interaction among the characters contains rich psychological hints in the silence. This kind of blank in the dialogue turns the silence into the emotional core of the image narration and makes the expression of the role relationship more profound.

6 Conclusion

As the sound narrative strategies of Chinese art films, silence and blank show the unique narrative effect by deeply touching the audience’s psychology and emotion. The restrained sound design and the delicate integration of ambient sound break the traditional framework of sound narration, and elevate the character’s mood, story tension and situational realism to a new level. The absence of sound does not weaken the expressiveness of the film, but endows the image with deeper philosophical implications and the possibility of open interpretation, and brings immersive viewing experience.

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