

Spatial Metaphor of *Thelma & Louise* from the Perspective of Feminism

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Abstract. Based on the expression of the theme of female subject consciousness, *Thelma & Louise* combines the openness of road films in terms of environment and landscape, casting feminism into spatial construction, effectively realizing the combination of Hollywood genre films and feminism. From a feminist perspective, this paper highlights the interactive construction between female body space, narrative space and the psychological space of two protagonists. As for the narrative space, the female body of two main characters deconstructed the solidified label of screen women. For the geospatial space, the static space and the dynamic space respectively shows the women's circumstances under a patriarchal society and the wokeness of the female mentality. In the term of the psychological space, the journey of the two main characters symbolized the liberate of the women's desire, expressed the dilemma between living and happiness. The film realizes the interactive construction of the female body, narrative and psychological space.

Key words: feminism; *Thelma & Louise*; space metaphor.

1. Introduction

Based on the ternary structure of Hegel's dialectic, French philosopher Henri Lefebvre proposed the three mutual influences, a mutual blend of social space production theory by combining material, spiritual and social three elements: for Lefebvre, social space is dependent on the interaction between material and spiritual space. At the same time, he extended and developed Nietzsche's philosophy of the body: "the production of space begins with the production of the body", emphasizing the integration of the body with nature to counteract the monotonous rhythm of social life [1].

As a road movie, *Thelma & Louise* fuses the construction of space with the representation of women's consciousness, achieving an effective interaction between the physical space and the spiritual space of the characters. This article based on the social space production theory of Lefebvre to analyze the interaction between feminism and space construction, which is divided into three different dimensions narrative space, geospatial space and psychological space.

2. Narrative Space: The "Remoldability" Construction of Female Characters

With the development of the second wave of feminism since the mid-twentieth century, the image of women in films and television series has also been gradually changing. Along with the slogan, "Let women return to their family" after World War II, housewives began to come to people's sights. In television series such as *The Donna Reed Show*, *Love it to Beaver* and *Bewitched*, household production ceaselessly strengthens family adhesion able to ameliorate the economic situation in the United States.

In the film, Thelma is exactly a housewife figure, however her behavior and personality deconstructed this stereotyped symbol, which shows the liberation of women's thoughts. During the 1970s and 1980s, under the leadership of the feminist social movement, more women entered the workplace.

Louis is a typical product of a reconfiguration of the role of women in the workplace during this period, with her neutral appearance breaking the male 'gaze' paradigm of the films and television series, and her calm and sensitive personality inheriting the traditional characteristics of women in the workplace. The construction of the two protagonists is, to a certain extent, a reconstruction of their role types in the context of contemporary discourse.

2.1 The “symbolized” female identity deconstruction

Symbols as a special product of human society on the ideological level, long with the development of human society, the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer in the book "human theory" pointed out that "from the perspective of human culture, symbolic thinking and symbolic behavior is the most representative characteristics of human life, can be defined as a symbol of animals" [2]. Human culture can be produced based on symbols, and human civilization can continue based on symbols. Similarly, the morality thought and norms of human society also rely on symbols. This deep-rooted culture and symbol concept in the full interpretation of literature and artworks, in the 1950s the postwar social economic policy guided the government and the media in the public channel to guide people's attention to family to enhance the social cohesion, women on the screen is thoroughly defined as the image of gentle, tame, housewife identity concept is deeply rooted in the hearts of the people [3].

Thelma in the movie *Thelma and Louis* is a typical housewife image, managing her husband's food, clothing, shelter and transportation, never complaining about her husband's enjoyment and unprovoked anger, and even when friends put forward the plan to travel together, afraid of being stopped by her husband. However, the film completely deconstructs and reshaped the image of Thelma as a "housewife" through narrative. Without consulting with her husband and informed, Thelma embarked on a trip with Louis, a revolver stuffed into a bag, flirting with a strange man in the bar, persuading Louis to relax and enjoy happiness and other series of the behavior of "housewife" this symbol for the reinterpretation of the era. Along with the development of narrative space, Thelma's image and character are the opposite of the "housewife" cheating, robbery, shooting lessons on the road encountering an obscene driver, etc., "housewife" became part of the male role mouth "crazy", but crazy is behind Thelma autonomous consciousness and the social environment by the alienation of female identity unwilling and roar.

Roland Barthes based on Saussure symbol concept of "binary opposition" put forward the construction of "myth", emphasizing the meaning between the meaning, that the first sequence symbol system after the new concept became a new concept, repeatedly forming the myth of all recognized systems [4]. Symbolized female identity production constructed the "housewife" the myth, *Thelma and Louis* through the road of typed narrative to break and reshape, based on the existing cultural code with the new image and concept, the image of the new "housewife" no longer tame and gentle, but full of vigor and energy, emphasizes the difference of female identity character, completed the female image in the new era.

2.2 The “reverse gaze” of the female image

Laura Mulvey inherited the mirror theory of Jaques Lacan, in its look, gaze as the eyes of the basis of the organ of desire emphasizes: "through the structure of women in the position of the image and narrative to successfully practice patriarchal culture replicate reproduction, so as to serve the internal contradictions of male culture imagination" [5]. In Laura Mulvey's view, the mainstream Hollywood commercial blockbusters in the construction of the female image, especially for its external appearance, the construction of the body image adopted a spectacle treatment, the spectacle of the construction of the female body makes its image is exaggerated as some alien image, becoming aesthetic viewing or desire to watch the object. The so-called alien actually emphasizes the differences and differences between the screen women and the real women, forming a strong contrast between the plump and excellent women on the screen and the ordinary women in real life. Film *Louis* image construction completely broke the "gaze", neutral dress and high hair on the head of the gender construction of strangeness from the "gaze" paradigm *Louis* is no longer a feminist thought only through behavior and character, appearance and body space construction directly show its internal thoughts and attitude —— male views and views is not the standard of women, from the male —— "other" gaze also cannot complete the alienation of female identity.

The female image of film and television construction always presents a thought and behavior of opposite, this opposite is derived from the male gaze under the patriarchal social system construction

women can be strong and independent, but always need the help of men or men in their life, can truly realize the value and meaning of their life. In the narrative space of the final flower, compared with the early Thelma after ten thousand panic and tension, Louis always showed a high degree of calm and alertness, overnight designated flight route, strong anti-reconnaissance consciousness and superb driving skills, all kinds of behavior constantly break the male gaze paradigm female image, make the audience through the eyes of the desire to watch the film in the identity of female independent image.

3. Geospatial Space: The Presence Representation of Female Subject Consciousness

The real space place of the film expression, with the geographical environment of the film story as the main expression object, is also the most common spatial landscape in film art. As a road film, the geographical space of *Thelma and Louis* is indispensable in the film's symbolic image, "road film is with the rise of the new Hollywood from the United States to the world's most important type, mainly to extend the change of the road and the road of people, scene, things as the background, build from the mainstream narrative space different flow space experience" [6]. On the one hand, the static space of the film constantly emphasizes the role of closed and closed symbols, which mainly shows the unfair treatment and objective facts of the mainstream patriarchal society and patriarchal society; on the other hand, the two protagonists find the true identity in the opening of the dynamic space — highway space and realize their self-consciousness in the flow space separated from the values of the patriarchal social system.

3.1 Static space: the interactive construction of identity and field domain

Identity is a prerequisite for the existence of human sociality. Communication, communication, and interaction with another identity in life are the basis of human social ideology. During the development of human society, 'identity' became the main basis for individual differences in human society, so that people can form a certain social order and social structure during communication with each other in social space. Gender is that human was born with the most primitive identity, with the social development of the sexual division of labor gradually blurred, in work, life and social environment of identity became inevitable, space for different identity overlapping field support, the same space internal identity and identity collision and space produced effective interaction, generated a special cultural landscape, as in Simone de Beauvoir, women are constructed, this construction is the result of the interaction between identity and space [7].

In terms of the geospatial performance of the film, *Thelma and Louis* realizes the reproduction of the social problems and phenomena caused by the solidification and labeling of the female identity in the static space. Thelma wanted to prepare breakfast and take a great tie for her husband in the morning before leaving, and her husband told her impatiently, "My work is very busy. I don't care about dinner!" In this kind of male and female master, the husband does not care for and even contempt for his wife is the normal American family and marriage relationship after World War II, and is also strong proof that women receive unfair treatment in the field of private life. The most obvious example is in when Thelma and Louis were wanted; the police came to Thelma's home with her husband Daryl planning on how to arrest the two women the police hope that Thelma and Louis can speak out to Daryl, so they said: "say some care about her, women like these meaningless things."

This kind of expression took static space as a signifier to refer to the blocking society, so a kind of interaction was created between female identity and static space, the static room is like a pool of stagnant patriarchal social order and its production of behavior, permanently solidified the female identity as ignorance, cowardly, timid housewife or hysterical shooting, robbery madman.

3.2 Dynamic space: the open interaction between consciousness and space

Consciousness is the subjective feeling of human beings about the world they live in. Compared with the psychological division of consciousness, preconsciousness and subconsciousness,

phenomenologists believe that consciousness is the product of the interaction between the body and space, and it is the feeling that the body knows in its space. Maurice Merleau-Ponty once pointed out: " My body seems to me as not just a part of the space, and if I don't have a body, there is no space to me" [8]. Only in the effective interaction between the body and space does human cognition and view of the world arise. Only relying on the feelings brought by extended organs such as vision, perception and hearing, can human beings communicate with space.

Space mobility is an important feature of highway film. Dynamic space provides realistic soil for the development of the film narrative, guiding the direction of the story and the expression of the theme. In the dynamic space of *Thelma & Louis* — highway space, the open space environment is accompanied by the awakening of the subject consciousness of the two protagonists. Thelma's ideology is one leap after another in the open road space. After hanging up the last police call, Thelma said to Louis: " I don't think I've ever been this sober before. Everything looks different."

The vast highway, the endless mountains and rivers and the vast starry sky act on the eyes of the visual organs eliminating the repression and restraint long given society, and instead awakening the free will of women and the longing for the fate of the female group.

4. Psychological Space: The Unconscious Dilemma of the Female

Unconsciousness is a concept proposed by Jung based on Freudian psychoanalysis. Collective unconsciousness refers to the collective cognition inherited by ancestors and shared by human biological groups. Trypophobia, for example, is generally believed to be derived from primitive humans' fear of snakeskin patterns. Their own awakening cannot become the key condition for women to be valued; they are forced to become "crazy", strive for their own power through "deviant behavior", and finally be branded as "hysteria".

4.1 Survival and pleasure: the resistance expression of dual desire

Freud strongly believed that when Libido abandoned the object of action and fixed it in itself, it would induce self-enjoyment, namely the so-called "narcissism" [9]. Desire comes from the ego level of human psychological space, and then returns to the self in the unconscious -- sleep, dream and other situations. As the buffer zone between identity and superego, the ego has the function of regulating the contradiction between identity and superego to satisfy the most primitive desire for identity in a reasonable way. It can be said that the ego is the goalkeeper of human consciousness. The contradiction between survival and pleasure expressed in the film is the product of the repeated tug of the characters' self-consciousness.

From the theme point of view, the film tells the story of the protagonist's escape process. The protagonist's desire for survival and survival is the hidden keynote throughout the film's narrative. The behavior of robbing stores is also the preparation of funds for escape. However, with the awakening of the protagonist's consciousness, Thelma and Louis, after waking up, realized the desire for the overall interests of the female group became a more important source of Libido than life. Therefore, the two gave up the negotiation conditions provided by the sheriff and resolutely decided to express the pursuit of the noble cause of female equality through death. Survival, as a need, comes from identity and is the animal instinct of human beings. When the need for survival reaches the level of self, it becomes a desire to extend life. At the same time, the realization of the interests of female groups is a power derived from the superego. Although the superego restrains the behavior of the self, at the same time, the power provided by the superego returns to the self as a false realization of desire, bringing the pleasure of realizing one's own value to human beings.

The act of driving off the cliff is the result of two people choosing pleasure between survival and pleasure, and it is the tragic victory of the superego in the competition between the identity and the superego. Looking at the death of Thelma and Louis from this perspective, we can find that it is the inevitable result of the dilemma caused by the unconscious alienation of the patriarchal society to the female group.

4.2 Mirror and transcendence: absent identity

Jaques Lacan's "mirror" theory: babies in 6-18 stage, to their own body parts cannot achieve complete control, in the baby standing in front of the mirror to see their complete body in the process; there are two mistakes, the first is the mirror as the others, the second is ecstatic to recognize the mirror, but the mirror image is really yourself, and in the process of confusion and their mirror confusion a desire to their complete body control of the false arrival [10]. In fact, in the long human life, mirror psychology has always accompanied human life in various forms of deformation.

This mirror his psychological behavior and is the most reasonable motive Louis to pull the trigger, in *Thelma* was forced by Harlan, Louis saw himself in *Thelma*; she pulls the trigger to kill is violated himself, but it is also a kind of identity absence presence, Louis did not agree before death is an assaulted woman, she always thinks women violated problem cannot be solved, so in the face of Sheriff Harlan negotiation conditions, choose to continue to escape. It can be said that there is also an unconscious dilemma in Louis' psychological space, that is, women are not born equal to men, and some unfair treatment will never be improved. But the film itself cannot be a tragedy in a real sense. The sheriff waving at the car and running at the two people rushing off the cliff is a strong proof that women break through the female group and the unconscious dilemma and are seen and valued.

5. Conclusion

Thelma & Louise, with the form of film as the medium, realizes the effective dissemination of feminism through the spatial narrative of highway genre films. Through the "reconstructive" construction of female roles, the narrative space breaks the alienated female images under the paradigm of the male gaze and makes the women on the screen return to reality. The geographic space reproduces the living landscape of the female group in the patriarchal society by virtue of the solidified static space and realizes the effective writing of the protagonist's self-awareness through the interaction between the reference of openness and freedom in the dynamic highway space and the protagonist's body perception. Finally, in the psychological space of the protagonists, the unconscious dilemma of the female group is reproduced in film and television, and the tragic victory of the two protagonist's "superego" challenges the distorted value concept of "otherization" of women.

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