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Publications in Film: A Study of the Ritualized Symbolic Meanings of Publications in Dramatic works

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Abstract:
Newspapers, books, paintings, audio-visual products and other publications frequently appear in films. It forms part of the ideographic elements of the film. We have observed that the publications that appear in the film are often not unintentional in front of the camera but play an extremely important role. It is not only to render the atmosphere, but also to shape the character symbol, and even promote the development of the plot, becoming the clue of the film's narrative. To this end, this paper attempts to sort out the functional significance of publications as film symbols in the rendering of film atmosphere, character building, and film narrative.

Keywords:
Semiotics of Cinema, Cinematic Aesthetics, Balazs

1 Introduction

Since the invention of the movie in 1895, both Chinese and foreign movies have developed greatly. Especially the 1960s, was an unprecedented golden period in the history of cinema. Not only French and German art critics, but also scholars from other countries in various fields began to study film semiotics and film aesthetics through film theories because of their passion and interest in film.

In the history of Chinese cinema, there have been seven generations of directors so far, and the expression and aesthetic state of the movie have turned with the times. In this paper, we study movie symbols and aesthetic expressions from the perspective of publications in movies. We observe that the images of publications such as newspapers, books, paintings and audio-visual products frequently appear in movies. It forms part of the ideographic elements of the movie. Their presence in front of the camera is often not unintentional but serves an extremely important function. It is not only to render the atmosphere, but also play a role in shaping the character symbols, and even promote the plot development, and become the clues of the movie narrative. Therefore, this paper tries to sort out the functional significance of publications as movie symbols in the rendering of atmosphere, characterization and narrative of movies.

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2 Literature Review

2.1 Semiotics

When you hear the word "semiotics," you seem to know what it means, but you can't begin to define what semiotics is. Almost never has there been a theory as widely adopted in the humanities and social sciences as semiotics, but at the same time unheard of by most people. Throughout the social media research related to semiotics, either search engine-like academic classroom, or scattered and fragmented popular science to the creation, so what is semiotics in the end? There are two mainstream views, one is that semiotics is the study of symbols or things regarded as symbols; one is that semiotics is the study of meaning and representation. The first kind of semiotics is the study of the ontological problem of what is a sign, and the latter is the study of the epistemological problem of how human beings recognize semiotics. Many philosophers and thinkers from ancient times to the present have studied symbols, but there has not yet been a unified definition of symbols, so the scope of semiotics appears to be subjective and too broad. There is a consensus that Saussure and Peirce are considered to be the co-founders of semiotics.

In his *"Course of General Linguistics"* published in 1916 after his death, Saussure borrowed the name from the Greek semiology and founded the subject of semiotics. He discussed this subject more in culture and society. He regards linguistics as a branch of semiotics, and also believes that the study of linguistics can be used as a template for the study of semiotics.

Peirce discussed this subject more in philosophy and logic. He borrowed Locke's concept to name this subject semiotics. In Peirce's *"Logical Aspects of Peirce's Philosophy"* he said, "This is a subject about symbols. Formal doctrine is also another name for logic."

In the field of drama, film and television, French filmmaker Christian Metz is a student of Roland Barthes, the master of semiotics. He is good at using semiotics to analyze and deepen the narrative structure and lens arrangement of movies. For example, Metz concluded from the history of the evolution of film language in *"Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema"* that "it is not because movies are language that they can tell good stories., but because it can tell good stories, it can become a language - this is essentially a conventional cultural product." In this way, Metz does not regard which symbols in the film as its language, nor does he equate the organizational form of symbols in the film with natural language. Instead, he reconstructs it based on the deconstruction of the "film-language" analogy. The theory of film semiotics.

In terms of how to treat film language and analyze the ideology of film representation objects, the famous Hungarian film esthetician and critic Béla Balazs has long paid attention to the intention of the pictures in films in *"Film Aesthetics"*. He believes that "the audience realizes and believes that they are watching a work with a certain purpose and intention, rather than watching a number of pictures that are randomly put together. This awareness and this information are a psychological aspect when watching a movie." (Bela Balazs, 1945)

2.2 Publications in Film

Publications in movies, as a common symbol of movies, include newspapers, books, paintings, audiovisual

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products and so on. Often, these publications do not appear in the movie in vain, but have a certain role to play. Some people think that publications appearing in movies can be the symbols of characters' character, some think that it sometimes foretells the fate of the characters, and some think that it is usually the clues of the movie's narrative and the need of the plot, etc.

It's worth mentioning that the research related to publications in films is mainly from the perspectives of film copyright and film commercialization at present. No scholars have ever studied publications in movies as symbolic elements and movie language.

Therefore, from the theories of film semiotics and film aesthetics, this paper will discuss whether the publication as a symbol can play the role of atmosphere rendering and characterization in the movie? What kind of atmosphere can it render? How is it rendered and shaped? How does the publication in the movie contribute to the narrative development of the movie?

3 Method: Questionnaire Survey

3.1 Scenario building

Based on the questions above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Publication materials will affect the audience’s perception of film characters

H2: Publication materials will affect the audience’s judgment of the plot development of the film

H3: Publication materials will affect the audience’s perception of movie scenes

In order to prove the hypotheses, this study utilized the questionnaire method to sample the total population.

3.2 Selection of research subjects

This hypothesis corresponds to the study population of all people. Firstly, watching movies is not a niche activity. All classes/groups are moviegoers and potential moviegoers, and the fact that the study population is not limited is a guarantee of the strong representativeness of the questionnaire. Secondly, the study population is all people, which facilitates the authenticity of the sample effect and prevents the professionals from influencing the tendency of the questionnaire results by judging the name of the movie through the screen. Thirdly, for the selection of this questionnaire, the target population is all people, which makes the questionnaire more practicable.

3.3 Sampling method

This questionnaire intercepts scenes where publications appear in the best Oscar movies from 1929 to 2022, especially scenes where characters interact with publications, and avoids scenes where famous movie stars appear and the audience is very familiar with them. 17 multiple-choice questions were formed to investigate the impact of publications in the film on character creation; to investigate the impact on the plot direction of narrative clues; to investigate the effect on atmosphere rendering; and to investigate the portraits of the inter-

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viewees and their movie viewing preferences.

4 Results

This survey was conducted on August 15, 2024 to complete the process of data collection, collation and analysis. A total of 182 valid responses were collected through WeChat Circle of Friends, Questionnaire Star mutual questionnaire and recommendation distribution. Basic information about the respondents below:

Table 1 Descriptive statistical analysis of the sample

Project	Category	Sample size	Sample proportions	Project	Category	Mean	standard deviation
Gender	male	61	33.52%	movie category preferences	Romance, urban	0.49	0.50
	female	115	63.19%		Action, Adventure	0.62	0.49
Age	Without wishing to disclose	6	3.30%		History, espionage	0.58	0.50
	Under 18 years of age	3	1.65%		Youthful, iconic	0.38	0.49
	18-30 years old	72	39.56%		Suspense, police procedural	0.44	0.50
	30-45 years old	86	47.25%		Thrills and horrors	0.16	0.37
	45 years of age or older	21	11.54%	N=182, 100%			

The basic situation of the respondents of this questionnaire is shown in the above table, 63.19% are female, 33.52% are male, and there are no other genders; the age is concentrated in 18-45 years old, 158 people in total, accounting for 86.81%; 3 people under 18 years old and 6 people who don't want to disclose their age, accounting for 4.95%; 21 people over 45 years old, accounting for 11.54%; all kinds of movie-viewing preferences have their own audience groups.

Publications exist today as a "thing of the past". Its camera language has a heavy sense of history and profound knowledge. Therefore, it can be used as a carrier of knowledge and history to add a sense of historical aesthetics to the movie and shape the characters, and even promote the plot development of the movie with the help of its knowledge and history carrier.

After research, it was found that more than 60% of the respondents believed that publication elements would affect the character creation (M=0.68, SD=0.47), plot development (M=0.69, SD=0.47), and atmosphere (M= 0.64, SD=0.48), less than 40% of the respondents believed that publication elements gave movies more cultural connotations (M=0.39, SD=0.49).

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4.1 Enhancement: Enhancement of the role of the publication in highlighting the status, culture and professional competence of the person

"Symbols are expressions of cultural identity, symbols of people's social identity and ideology." Stuart Hall, a British sociology professor, has profoundly studied the relationship between symbols and culture shaping in his book "Stuart Hall's Studies in Cultural Theory". Through a questionnaire, we analyze the positive correlation between publications in films in the context of film aesthetics and semiotics in shaping character status, culture and professional competence, including exploring how textual and visual sources shape the expression and meaning of films.

We designed a study to show that when a movie does not use publication props, the protagonist leaves a weaker impression on the audience than when it uses publication props. Independent sample t test showed that publication elements significantly affected the audience's social status ($t=17.46$, $p<0.001$), cultural level ($t=10.18$, $p<0.001$) and professional ability ($t=11.36$, $p<0.001$) of movie characters. cognition. Specifically, publications will improve audiences' evaluations of film characters in these aspects. The narrative of the character itself will be fuller in the context of the publication.

4.1.1 Application of publications: highlighting the social status of the characters in the play

"Everything is a symbol. The globalization of symbols is the inevitable result of the globalization of culture." Roland Barthes has long elaborated on the relationship between symbols and culture. Just as any symbol that appears in a movie, such as a publication, the construction of a character is not only composed of Its behavior, words and other components. The setting of the scene when the character appears is also closely related to the character's image. The movie *"GREEN BOOK"* (2018) uses the behavior of the protagonist, the black pianist Dr. Shelley, reading newspapers as a symbol many times to shape his social status in the upper-class society in the United States in the 1960s, when racial discrimination was serious. This is in stark contrast to other images of black people that appear later in the film.

One scene features the famous African American pianist Dr. Don Shirley reading a newspaper in a 1960s American hotel room. The focus of this action is on him absorbing the news of the era, which not only highlights the racial tensions and social issues of the time, but the scene subtly emphasizes the contrast between Dr. Shirley's elevated social status and the prevailing racial prejudice. It's also a reflection of the wider social climate as the story unfolds.

Another scene shows Dr. Don Shelley reading a newspaper on the train, with the driver, Tony Lipp, sitting next to him writing a letter. This scene is important in that it depicts a rare moment of calm and introspection during their journey. The fact that Dr. Shelly is absorbed in his reading and Tony is focused on his letter highlights the different ways in which they cope with the stress and loneliness of the journey. The director uses this scene of presence as a subtle demonstration of their growing friendship and mutual respect, despite their different backgrounds, as well as an expression of Dr. Shelly, a black man of extraordinary social status.

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4.1.2 The meaning of the publication: to show the cultural level of the characters in the image

French female writer and existential philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) believed that "symbols can not only convey information, but also shape concepts and reshape reality." Publications in movies, not Being limited to books and images helps shape the cultural codes that films can exploit. The depiction of certain themes, character archetypes or settings in films may be influenced by depictions in literature and art, which have their own set of cultural and semiotic meanings.

For example, in the movie *"A BEAUTIFUL MIND"* (2001), there is a scene where the protagonist John Nash spreads dozens of newspapers on the ground and lowers his head to analyze them. The jumble of journal and newspaper articles represents the vast amount of information he is analyzing and the depth of his knowledge of his work, highlighting his uncanny ability to synthesize and link disparate information. This in turn emphasizes his extraordinary intelligence and his ability to think at a high level. At the same time, this scene is accompanied by a background music composed by James Horner, with a tense and dissonant rhythm, which enhances the feeling of chaos experienced by Nash and strengthens the emotional weight of the scene. Horner's use of string and orchestral elements also creates a palpable atmosphere of urgency and pain, shaping Nash's inner self as he also struggles with delusions and obsessions.

4.1.3 Shaping of publications: shaping professional competencies in line with characterization

The use of specific publications, framing techniques, and visual themes in film can be traced back to Quentin Tarantino's description of the influential artistic style and photographic tradition that often includes intertextual references to various genres and media. citation, creating a semiotic network that enriches the audience’s understanding.

In *"CODA" (2021 Oscar Best Picture)*, a girl who has not yet been recognized for her musical talent is in the music classroom of the school. A poster of a lobster playing the cello and sending out melodious music notes appears. This poster can be seen as a symbol with multiple layers of meaning. First, the image of the lobster playing the cello is whimsical and unconventional in nature. It indicates the unexpected appearance or some unconventional nature of musical talent, and that it may appear in unexpected places. This reflects the heroine Ruby's unique position as the only hearing member of a deaf family, and her struggle to have her musical dreams and abilities recognized. Secondly, the poster expresses tolerance and acceptance by juxtaposing the lobster with the cello, symbolizing the need to break down barriers and break stereotypes, both in terms of individual talents and acceptance of people who are different, music for girls Talents paves the way for achieving certain attainments and gaining support. The poster's imagination echoes the characters' personalities, emphasizing the film's theme that true talent and creativity often defy traditional norms and expectations.

4.2 Narrative: publications contribute to the development of the program's plot

In TV dramas and movies, symbols used as props can significantly affect the development of the plot and deepen the narrative. Analyzing this through the lens of film semiotics (the study of signs and symbols in films) can provide insight into how these props serve as carriers of meaning and contribute to storytelling.

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After research, it was found that more than 60% of the respondents believed that publication elements would have an impact on the plot development of the movie (M=0.69, SD=0.47).

4.2.1 Publications in films contribute to deepening the narrative of the image

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), the originator of Swiss psychology, believed that "symbols are an investigation of people's subconscious minds and are the projection of people's emotions, desires and fears." In TV dramas and movies, symbols used as props can significantly affect the development of the plot and deepen the narrative. Analyzing this through the lens of film semiotics (the study of signs and symbols in films) can provide insight into how these props serve as carriers of meaning and contribute to storytelling. For example, in the movie "*The English Patient*", the male protagonist with burns all over his body was rescued by nurse Hannah and others to a temporary field hospital. After telling Hannah his poignant love past, he begged Hannah to inject him with a large amount of morphine. Finally, the "English Patient" died with his memories. Hannah reads him his favorite book, a calm and tangled scene that deepens the emotional conflict of the narrative.

It is noteworthy that the book, which appears as a prop, often also exists as a lens that introduces aesthetics and values. This allows for a beautiful combination of narrative and aesthetics and a high level of artistic achievement.

4.2.2 The publication becomes the medium through which the plot can be decoded

Publications in film help to decode how books, images and publications affect cinematic meaning from a semiotic perspective. They play an important role in film adaptations of literature, especially when the adaptation process involves the translation of textual symbols into visual symbols. The intricate descriptions of the novel become visual metaphors or imagery in the movie, which the audience then interprets through familiar cultural or semiotic codes.

The *Green Book* pamphlet in the movie "*Green Book*" refers to the so-called "Black Travel *Green Book*". It is a travel guide for black people that was popular in the United States in the 1960s. It is a must-have when traveling in the southern United States., as the line says, "It lists the places where black people can stay when traveling in the South." In the plot, it is an object with specific cultural significance. As a signifier, it has a culturally established meaning that is easily understood by the audience. In the drama, it undoubtedly serves as a prop to promote the development of the plot, by strengthening and contrasting the behavior of the characters. Enrich the plot and decode the plot. Green, the original author of the *Green Book*, was a black man who suffered a lot while traveling in the South, so he compiled this booklet as a travel guide. "*Green Book*" was made into a movie and gained huge influence because it taught us to embrace the differences between people, let go of fear, and be brave enough to understand the essence of others. There are actually more similarities between people than differences.

4.3 Aesthetics: the publication creates a far-reaching audiovisual atmosphere

The atmosphere in a film is crucial to creating mood and immersing the audience in the story. From an aesthetic point of view, the atmosphere is rendered through various techniques and elements, including lights,

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sounds, colors and props. Through our investigation, we found that publications in movies, such as newspapers, books, and magazines, can also play a role in creating and enhancing the atmosphere. The independent sample t-test showed that rendering atmosphere (M=0.64, SD=0.48) and publication elements significantly affected the audience's feeling and perception of the atmosphere of the movie story.

4.3.1 Aesthetic techniques: publications are key to the atmosphere of the program

Wang Guowei once said in *"Ren Jian Ci Hua"*, "All words of scenery are emotional." Chinese culture emphasizes the expression of mood. The publications that appear in the movie, such as newspapers and headlines, can be used to reflect themes of media ethics and current events, helping to create a real news atmosphere for the story. These publications help establish the time period and connect the narrative threads of the movie, enhancing its emotional and thematic depth. For example, in *"CODA"*, when the boys visit the girls' home, the layout of the girls' rooms, the numerous posters on the top of the triangular attic, and the choice of colors for the posters - pink, yellow, and white - not only reflect the age of high school girls in the throes of love, but also demonstrate the girls' private love of art, and add a touch of romantic adolescence to the dating of the boys and girls in their flowery season.

4.3.2 Narrative Mood: Publications in the movie provide background information for the story

The American director-producer Martin Scorsese believes that "movies are about what's in the box and what's outside." His point of view directly reveals the unity of presence and absence, and its role in telling stories. Publications within a film can act as "characters", situating the story in a specific time or place, providing background information, while also reflecting the mood or theme of the narrative. For example, the "poster" of the image of BIRDMAN with a gray metal mask in *"Bird Man"* and the *"Interview Report of the Iron Man Movie"* on TV serve as plot devices and appear in the screen at the same time as the protagonist. , the dark poster, metal hood, black wings, only the cold and expressionless lower half of the face exposed, and the use of large areas of black not only advance the plot, but also appropriately express the protagonist's seemingly expressionless face. Feelings of anxiety and restlessness. Its interspersed appearance can symbolize knowledge, mystery, or narrative emotions in which characters develop towards madness.

5 Discussion

French film theorist André Bazin has a more profound view on image ontology and narrative structure. He believes that "to better understand a film's tendencies, it is best to first understand how the film expresses its tendencies." The symbolism and themes of film publication symbols are rendered through a combination of aesthetic techniques and props. Publications such as newspapers and books can significantly create atmosphere by providing contextual details, reflecting themes, and enhancing the context and mood of a film. Thematic elements and symbols in films are often inspired by literary works or images, and many films incorporate symbols and themes originating from classic literature or art, enriching the film's aesthetic by aligning with established cultural symbols and themes.

Publications exist today as a "thing of the past". Its camera language has a heavy sense of history and pro-

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found knowledge. Therefore, it can be used as a carrier of knowledge and history to add a sense of historical aesthetics to the movie and shape the characters, and even promote the plot development of the movie with the help of its knowledge and history carrier.

The characters are more fully fleshed out due to the publication. The construction of a publication's role is not only composed of its actions, words, etc. The setting of the scene when the character appears is also closely related to the character's image. We designed a study to show that when a movie does not use publication props, the protagonist leaves a weaker impression on the audience than when it uses publication props. Research shows that publications themselves symbolize civilization and social norms in the context of our society, whether it is the portrayal of Dr. Don Shirley in the movie "*Green Book*" or the newspaper in the movie *"A Beautiful Mind"* The expression of the conflicting inspirations and ambitions of John Nash and the shaping of the heroine RUBY's musical dream by the lobster poster in the movie "*CODA*" all reflect that publications in movies often reflect personal interests, values and identities. These characters become more fleshed out because of the publication.

It is worth mentioning that publications can also be used as props for plot development and play a role in promoting the plot. According to Propp's narrative structure analysis method, publications exist as props in many movies. The famous German writer and thinker Siegfried Kracauer also said in his book *"The Nature of Film"* that "every picture and every means has a special nature, which creates a favorable expression for certain types of things. conditions, and create obstacles for other types of things" (Siegfried Kracauer, 1960).

At the same time, the publication can play a role in rendering the atmosphere, which is divided into two categories: introduction shots and narrative shots. The introduction shot mainly plays the role of explaining the scene of the event. In the introductory shots, prints, as one of the accompanying symbols, can play a "rendering" function on the scene, making the scene more imaginative. Through the technical means to generate two sections containing prints and does not contain prints of the footage, let the audience watch and compare, when the prints appeared in the introduction of the scene in the camera, the audience can more deeply feel the "far-reaching meaning". The viewers felt that this feeling was indescribable, but that the presence of these prints "made the picture more beautiful and more comfortable".

The Chinese film pioneers also had their own insights and practices on film symbols and narrative structures as early as the 20th century. As early as the 1930s, Chinese film director Fei Mu creatively proposed that the most important thing about the art form of film is to "create the air in the drama." *A Brief Discussion on "Air"* is a direct demonstration of Fei Mu's thoughts on movie art. Fei Mu proposes that "air" is a unique artistic expression of the movie, and that images and accompanying sound effects shape the unique artistic charm of the movie. Through the expression of these symbols, the movie introduces the audience to its world and allows the audience to truly mingle with it.

6 Conclusion

The semiotic study and aesthetics of cinema have always been able to attract research from multiple perspectives in the academic world. The study of publication as a cultural symbol may not be extensive and perfect, but the fate of art and the appreciation of the masses are enough to determine the fate of the movie

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itself. The fate of art and the public's appreciation of it are dialectically intertwined, and this is one of the fixed rules in the history of art and culture. Art enhances the taste of the masses, and the enhanced taste of the masses, in turn, demands and promotes the further development of art. The high cost of films and the extreme complexity of the collective creative process make it impossible for anyone with artistic aspirations to create a masterpiece free from the tastes or prejudices of the times. We need an audience of responsible and capable aesthetes who build their own mental castles in reality through cinema. We will continue our research on movie aesthetics and aesthetic symbols.

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