On the Evolution of Film Narrative Time Theory

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ABSTRACT. *Narration cannot be separated from language, which is the constituent material of narration; narration cannot be separated from time, which can eliminate the compensation of absence, and which can be historical or illusory; narration cannot be separated from knowledge, which means discourse power; narration cannot be separated from society, and the communication information between people produces narration at all times. Whether it is literary narratology or film narratology, time is the core issue. This paper discusses in detail the theory of film narrative time and its evolution.*

1. Introduction

Narrative time is the core issue of narratology. Russian formalism defines "story" as the actual events in the works in his literary theory. These events can have time sequence or causality, but they must be unfolded and completed in a certain time sequence; "plot" refers to the way in which readers know the events, that is, the way in which the works arrange the events, indicating the sequence of events in the works. The difference between story and plot in Russian formalism can be connected with the dichotomy of language of Geneva linguistic school represented by Saussure, and can be extended to the study of structuralist narratology. In the writings of French scholar Tzvetan Todorov and American scholar Symour Chatman, this difference has evolved into story or discourse. In Todorov's colleagues Gérard Genette, this difference became a story.[1] The research on narrative discourse mainly includes narrative tense, time, voice, mode, character description, expression of character discourse, etc. The representative figures of this research paradigm include Todorov, Genette, and Gaudreault and Jost.

2. On Todorov's Narrative Time Theory

Todorov's *Narrative as Discourse* divides discourse into narrative time (temporal category), narrative style (voice category) and narrative mode (mode category).

Specifically, narrative time represents the relationship between story time and speech time; narrative style refers to the relationship between the narrator and the characters, and it can be divided into "greater than", "equal to" and "less than", which are also known as posterior observation, simultaneous observation and external observation; narrative mode is the speech type used by the narrator, namely narration and description. He believes that "in a sense, narrative time is a kind of linear time, while the time of story occurrence is three-dimensional." In the story, several events can occur at the same time, but the discourse must narrate them one by one, and a complex image is projected onto a straight line. Therefore, in terms of narrative time, multiple events can occur at the same time, but discourse must be narrated one by one. The actual events can not overlap at one time point. Who is the first? Who is behind? This is an obstacle that the narrator cannot overcome. Todorov proposes that the time layout can be divided into coherence, alternation and insertion in the organization of story time. Coherence is the juxtaposition of different stories. As soon as the first story is finished, the second story begins. In time, there is first and then followed by linear motion in natural order; alternation is to narrate two stories at the same time. First, the first story is stopped, then the second story is told, and then the first story is stopped. There is freedom of choice in time and no longer a single person, and   insertion is to insert one story into another story. The choice of time makes the story more rich. In addition, Todorov also believes that there are reading perception time and writing statement time in narrative time. When the narrator tells or writes a story to us, it is time to state; perceived time is irreversible time, which limits the perception of the whole.

3. On Genette's Narrative Time Theory

Compared with Todorov's narrative theory, Genette's *Narrative Discourse* has obvious inheritance and change. In the *Introduction to Narrative Discourse*, he adjusted Todorov's narrative discourse into three categories: time, style and mode.

First of all, in the category of time, he deleted "the statement time of writing and the perceptual time of reading". He thinks that this induction is easy to be confused with story time and speech time. Referring to Todorov's classification, he puts forward three new classifications: tense, mood and voice. The former two are about the form or degree of narrative reproduction, and the latter is related to the verb state and the subject of the statement. Finally, it is divided into sequence, time interval and frequency. Secondly, in the form of language, Genette studies the "form of expression" of narrative, puts forward "distance" and "focus", and divides the focal length into three parts: "unfocused or zero focus", "internal focus" and "external focus", which can be used to solve the problem of "who sees?", "who says it?" or "Who's looking at this?" In film, it is often called "viewpoint", which refers to the focus of narrative discourse or text; "who says?" In the film, it is often called "voice over" or "voice inside picture", which means the voice problem of narrative discourse or text. In addition, Genette combined Todorov's "style" and "mode" into a category "voice". In content, he wrote Todorov's three relationships between narrator and character in "style", and then the style was incorporated into frequency

and style. There are five chapters in the framework of narrative discourse, which are sequence, duration, frequency, mode and voice.

The western narrative time theory originated from Todorov and has been perfected by Genette. It is worth mentioning that the concept of "tense" which involves the concept of film narrative time has a great impact on the following film narratology. According to the incongruity between narrative sequence and story sequence, Genette proposed "prolepse" and "analepse". In order to analyze in detail, he further explained the concepts of span, amplitude, first and second narration. In terms of narrative speed, Genette analyzes four narrative movements: ellipse, pause descriptive, scene and recit sommaire, according to the relationship between narrative time and story time embodied in narrative movement. According to the frequency relationship between narration and story, Genette classifies the repetition of some similar events and the number of narration into four types: single narration (there are two situations, one event is told once or more events are told many times), repeated narration and abstract narration. The above research contents are worthy of affirmation. Genette has adopted general to individual research methods to enhance the credibility of text analysis, and has become the paradigm of narrative analysis.[3]

4. On the Theory of Narrative Time of Gaudreault and Jost

In the foreword of *What is Film Narratology*, Andre Gaudreault and Francois Jost says that when they discuss the narrative time of film text, they inherit the research theory of narrative discourse of Metz and Genette. This book is regarded as the transfer of narrative system to film. In the introduction and the first chapter "film and narrative", Gaudreault and Jost make a basic definition of film narrative. The research on "narrative temporality and film" extends the first three chapters of Genette's narrative discourse, focusing on the temporal distortion of films. The "space of film narrative" and "viewpoint" correspond to the "mode" part of Genette's *Narrative Discourse*, and discuss the issues of distance and viewpoint. The "statement" and "words and pictures" correspond to the "voice" part of Genette's *Narrative Discourse*, and discusses the narrator and story layer.

Gaudreault and Jost believe that "any narrative establishes two kinds of temporality: the temporality of the event being told and the temporality of the act of narration." Based on Genette's concepts of narrative time sequence, duration and frequency, this paper discusses the issue of narrative time comprehensively. As for the time distortion of movies, the most common time reversal errors in movie texts are flashback (flashback and review), which can be divided into three types: external flashback, internal flashback and mixed flashback. According to the event time before or after the initial narration of the text, it can be divided into external flashback and internal flashback; mixed flashback starts before the initial narration of the text, but continues after the initial narration. Different from describing the future events in advance, internal flashback is more rare than external flashback and mixed flashback. On the issue of film timing, Gaudreault and Jost also sums up four common synchronic forms. The first is simultaneous movement in the same scene; the second is simultaneous movement in the same picture; the third is simultaneous

action in succession; the fourth is simultaneous action appears alternately in montage. The first one is more realistic. When discussing the length of the film, they notice that there is a special kind of duration in the film, such as the use of some descriptive paragraph or commentary paragraph, or the insertion of some pictures unrelated to the event action, resulting in the narrative time being longer than the story length (TR > th), and resulting in the indefinite extension of narrative time. Gaudreault and Jost adds "expansion" to the four types of paragraph length of Genette. In addition, in the study of narrative time and frequency, Gaudreault and Jost pay attention to the four narrative time and frequency proposed by Genette. They think that the film can be narrated many times with language and pictures, which can be reflected not only in the paragraph of a movie text, but also in the whole text, emphasizing the characteristics of repetition and omission in time.

5. Conclusion

So far, from Todorov as the theoretical leader, he begin to study and analyze a few works, initially discuss the narrative time, and then Genette continues Todorov's theoretical framework, innovates the research methods, and starts from the specific works to make the research content more systematic and clear. Later, Gaudreault and Jost constantly improves the narrative time theory. In addition, it forms the most important content in the contemporary study of film narrative time.

References

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