

The Influence of Film Expression Techniques on Visual Presentation

Yanbing Ji

*Film and Media Studies, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, USA
yaj47@pitt.edu*

Abstract. The reason why suspense films can attract the audiences a lot is not only due to the complex plot design and dialogue promotion, but also to the overall atmosphere they create at the visual and auditory levels. This article takes *The Invisible Guest* (2016) directed by Spanish director Oriol Paulo as the object of analysis, starting from four dimensions: color tone, editing rhythm, sound and music design, and camera movement to explore how these audio-visual techniques could work together to gradually build up the tension and psychological suspense in the film. Through careful observation of specific sequences, the study analyzed the interactive relationship between different elements. For example, cold tones and slow-paced editing work together to enhance the sense of spatial oppression, and the gradual change of music rhythm and the movement trajectory of the camera create emotional traction. Finally, this essay believes that the charm of suspense in the film "The Invisible Guest" comes from the combination of narrative content and audio-visual techniques. This fusion not only improved the emotional tension of the film, but also shows the wide range of possibilities of suspense films in terms of expression.

Keywords: *The Invisible Guest*, Suspense Film, Film Expression Techniques, Sound Effect, Camera Movement

1. Introduction

Film is a powerful but magical medium that plays an important role in communicating with the audience through many ways. Though many people might think the way film could talk because of the story and dialogues, audiovisual techniques could also express the feelings in some ways. Elements such as color tone, editing, sound design and camera movement work together to shape the mood of the scene that influences the viewers' response to the movie and guide their explanation and understanding of the narrative. These techniques often process subtly but they play such significant role in how the message of the film is constructed and received.

This paper aims to explore how these elements affect both the visual presentation and the viewer's experiences in watching film. By looking deeply into the Spanish mystery thriller film *The Invisible Guest* (2016), directed by Oriol Paulo, this study analyzes how specific designed choices can contribute to suspenseful narrative and emotional engagement. Focusing on 4 main aspects, color tone, editing style, sound and music and camera movement, indicating that how the film creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and tension that catches the audience's attention continually and

strengthen the psychological impact. As the writer Yixuan Li pointed out in the research of Spanish mystery film, the film “The Invisible Guest” did not reveal a single truth through a linear narrative, but constructs a system of “delayed truth” through unreliable narration, multiple perspectives, and repeated reversals [1].

2. Case analysis

2.1. The impact of film color tone on atmosphere and emotional communication

It is very common that different color usually present different atmosphere or mood in film. For example, warm colors like red, orange and yellow usually connected to positive emotions like warmth, energy and passion while cool colors like blue, green and purple usually connected to calm, thoughtful, mysterious, even melancholic. When people experience positive mood like joy and happiness, bright colors make audience intuitive feel the characters’ satisfaction and happiness. However, when the character is in a negative mood, dark colors can highlight the pain and struggle of the character [2]. Additionally, authors like Ammer, S. M. E. I. has explored how light and color construct an "emotional map", reminding us of the psychological guidance of non-verbal elements in images [3].

In the film “The Invisible Guest”, the director Oriol Paulo used the color style to emphasize the effect of narrative masterly, especially plays a key role in reflecting the suspense atmosphere and the thoughts inside the characters. The whole film is dominated by cold colors. The use of blue-gray, dark green and those low-saturation colors intensifies the depressing but somewhat rational atmosphere, which echoes the psychological state of the protagonist Adrián Doria. At the first time he stated the case to his lawyer Virginia, the picture was cold, the light was soft but dark, and most of the characters were placed in the shadows. This kind of visual effect shows that he is attempting to grasp the overall situation, but also indicating the possibility that he is hiding something. On the contrary, in the last half of the film, when Virginia presses on and the truth is gradually revealed, the color contrast of the picture begins to increase, the shadows become darker, and the lighting on the faces becomes sharper. This kind of inverse on color not only enhances the audience’s sense of tension, but also shows the psychological changes and confrontations between characters directly. It is much likely to connect with the idea from Kovsh, Oleksandr and Dziuba, Mykyta that when choosing to use a certain color, directors focus on the general human associations associated with a particular color. However, there is always the option of subjective reading, which depends on personal preference for color and the benefits of harmonious combinations. You can see that every director tries to convey the mood, tone, or character of the characters to the viewer through the art of color. And it is through these aspects and associations that we conclude that color has a symbolic meaning in cinema [4].

One obvious example occurs in the plot that Adrián describes the happen of the car crash. In his very first version of the narrative, the accident was handled very "cleanly", using bright and cold tones to create the picture, seemingly objective and neutral; While when Virginia guides him to review the more realistic version, the memories scenes become more gloomy, and the tones become warmer and heavier, suggesting that the emotions behind them are more complex and closer to the truth. Color in here not only help the audience distinguish the different narrative versions, but also becomes an important clue to reveal the characters' inner thoughts and push the story.

Therefore, the color style in the film is not just a simple aesthetic choice, but a visual language that closely integrated with the narrative. It helps the audience to judge and feel between the memories and the reality that are unclear whether they are true or false, and also strengthens the

expression of multiple perspectives and the theme of "Who is lying?" Through subtle changes in color, "The Invisible Guest" has transformed the visual style into part of the narrative successfully which allow the audience to not only passively accept information during the viewing process, but also actively seek the truth in the details.

2.2. The influence of editing rhythm on creating film atmosphere

Editing not only affects the linear relationship of the narrative but is also directly related to the audience's attention and emotional changes. The director uses montage techniques to show different angles and perspectives on the crime in the film, and uses editing to reveal the relationships between the characters and the truth at the end in the film.

In the production process of modern films, editing rhythm is not only used to connect shots and maintain narrative coherence, but also to guide the audience's emotions and to create the emotional atmosphere of the film. By using different editing methods and ways, even the same shot and information could be presented differently in different timelines. For example, in the film, Adrián's discussion with lawyer Virginia is interspersed with repeated scenes of the case, which in a way kind of guides the audience to discover the truth and also builds a suspenseful atmosphere. The scenes also got changed with Adrian's psychological changes, from the initial clean scenes of trying to rationally distance himself from the case to the real but dark scenes when his psychological defenses started to collapse.

Montage, though, as the key concept of editing, has long become an important bridge for building image communication and audience feelings in the development of film. Montage is the transliteration of the Russian word "montage" which is actually what is commonly known as editing. In the practical application of montage, more and more filmmakers have gradually formed a huge montage system from point to surface through their own artistic creation and innovative shots combination: Parallel montage, cross montage, symbolic montage, psychological montage, etc. [5]. The film uses cross-montage subtly, alternating between real interrogation conversations and Adrian's memories, constructing a narrative structure that crosses time and space. The film begins with the opening conversation between Adrián and Virginia. The narrative and fragmentary memories of the past case development are constantly introduced and put in the process and are almost all presented to the audience in complete clips. However, the process of recalling is interrupted by questioning and refutation of the conversations happens in the present, thus, a circular editing has been formed to try to restore the truth of the case. The use of this cross-montage technique not only breaks the traditional time narrative, but also plays a key role in promoting the development of the plot. Through the constant memorizing and questioning, Adrian's memories begin to have loopholes, and it is because of these edits that the audience begins to realize that the truth is still buried very deep and is not what Adrian said very clearly at the beginning gradually. In the second half of the film, as the intensity of the dialogue increases, the pace of the film becomes noticeably faster, and the flashbacks begin to become more and more intense. The rhythm of the editing echoes the psychological changes of the characters which create a strong psychological tension. In addition to cross-montage, the film has also used contrast montage through differentiated editing of tones and action details, providing the audience with hints on how to distinguish true and false memories.

2.3. The role of music, sound effects and camera movement in enhancing audience immersion

Film music, sound effects and camera movement play important roles in enhancing the audience's feelings. For example, how background music with strong drum beats can guide the audience's emotions into a suspense film; how horror sound effects can enhance the audience's participation; and how camera movements (such as push-pull shots and handheld photography) can simulate the character's psychological state to enhance the tension of the film.

In modern movies, especially suspense and thriller films, immersive experience has slowly become an important goal to attract audiences and enhance the emotional engagement. The key to this experience depends not only on the tension of the story itself, but also on the tricky coordination of audio-visual language and techniques. Background music, environmental sound effects and camera movement are important and expressive elements in audio-visual language that playing vital roles in mobilizing the audience's emotions, guiding their focus and strengthening their psychological resonance. As Bente et al. pointed out in their study about film music and the sense of suspense, the presence of sound can significantly enhance the audience's attention to the development of the plot and their emotional response, thereby promoting the formation of an immersive experience [6]. While the research of Yilmaz et al. further pointed out that even without changing the development of the plot and the emotional tone, different camera movements can significantly enhance the audience's sense of immersion [7]. Both studies have pointed out almost the same point: suspense not only comes from narrative structure, but is also composed of visual and auditory senses.

In the film "The Invisible Guest", This synergy is particularly obvious. The director effectively manipulates the audience's emotional rhythm and attention through the coordination of music and camera movement, creating a highly immersive experience. The interrogation scenes that appear repeatedly in the film have a slow rhythm and a low, depressing timbre. When the characters hesitate or make eye contact, the low-frequency part will suddenly strengthen, pushing the audience to pay close attention to the details of this part. This layout, as studied by Bente et al., conforms to the psychological mechanism of suspense: the audience oscillates and questions between expectation and uncertainty, is in a state of high tension physiologically, and has strong expectations psychologically [6]. At the same time, the film uses a combination of handheld shots and panning shots in several memory sequences to create a sense of instability which let the audience to be closer to the perspective of the characters themselves in terms of visual effects, especially when recalling the hotel sequence. This approach echoes the experimental findings of Yilmaz et al.: dynamic shots can mobilize the audience's physiological perception, enhance their sense of immersion and participation [8]. Especially in the scene that recalls the car accident, the combination of rapid handheld shots and the suddenly intensified background music and sound effects makes the picture rhythm speed up abruptly, pushing the narrative to a climax. This audiovisual synergy intensifies the emotional tension of the film, creating a sense of suspense beyond the narrative, and thus pushing the immersive experience to a climax.

3. Discussion

To sum up with, this article will attempt to propose a comprehensive and integrated perspective that shows the above techniques do not exist as independent individuals, but cooperate with each other in the actual creative process to jointly create a film that is both expressive and appealing, and how these elements are combined to make the suspense film "The Invisible Guest" so successful.

From above we can see that the reason why "The Invisible Guest" can create a tense and suspenseful atmosphere within limited information and space is that it benefits from the joint effect of multiple audio-visual languages in specific situations. Color, editing, background music/sound effects and camera movement, although they each have their own different functions, through their joint cooperation and mutual support in the film, a smooth rhythm and strong psychological mobilization are constructed, thus providing a solid foundation for the film itself. The overall tone of the film is cold, mainly gray-blue, which strengthens the sense of spatial alienation and the calm atmosphere of trial. However, in some key plots, such as when Adrián hesitated, the combination of tone and bass created a momentary shock, making the audience to feel some psychological discomfort in the strong auditory and visual impact. In addition, the film used a lot of cross-cuttings and flashbacks when conveying information, combined with the progressive rhythm of music, fully mobilizes the audience's emotions and creates a strong curiosity and pleasure to uncover the truth. As Linyao Luo mentioned in her article, the combination of color and montage will make the emotions expressed in the film richer, metaphorically express more emotions, deepen the audience's understanding of the theme of the film, create a story atmosphere, and highlight the vividness of the characters [9]. This combination not only helps the narrative but also strengthens the control over the film's rhythm. The music and sound effects in the film do not just appear as the background as we usually think, but are more like a guide to the film's rhythm. When the character's psychological fluctuations are more intense, such as when Adrián responds to what happened in the hotel, the director uses handheld and slow-motion surround shots to symbolize the protagonist's own sense of instability and fear, allowing the audience to feel the character's uneasy psychology more immersively. There is a contrary between the movement of the camera and the character's standing still which to some extent reveals Adrian's inner collapse, anxiety and concealment.

4. Conclusion

The research result of this study is that in the movie "The Invisible Guest", the director does not rely on a single narrative strategy to create the sense of suspense, but through the combination of multiple audio-visual techniques such as color tone, editing rhythm, soundtrack and camera movement to construct a continuous tension and psychological traction. The film uses cold colors to create a depressing and alienated atmosphere and the editing rhythm is used to effectively to manipulate the order of information to release and also the reversal rhythm. The addition of music and ambient sound at key moments enhances the audience's emotional experience, while the movement of the camera blurs the boundaries between reality and imagination through spatial scheduling and subjective vision. These elements work together at specific narrative points which effectively guide the audience into the "cognitive trap" set by the director and stimulating them to actively participate in information screening and finding the truth.

The research further concluded that the tension and expressiveness of a suspense film does not only depend on the complexity of the story and the amount of information in the lines, but more deeply relies on the coordinated construction of the audio-visual language at the expression and psychological levels. Audiovisual techniques play a very important role in maintaining the audience's attention, manipulating emotional rhythm and promoting plot understanding. Especially in puzzle-type narratives, the ingenuity of their design directly affects the audience's acceptance path and depth of immersion.

This research has provided some inspiration for other studies in the future which mainly affect on how we re-understand the relationship between suspense film genre aesthetics, audio-visual mechanism and audience participation. It has also provided some theoretical support for how

filmmakers can allocate audio-visual resources to control rhythm and guide emotions. Future researches should focus more on the differences in audience perception of these techniques in different cultural environment, and how these strategies adapt and evolve in other types of films. The researches could also combine with audience interviews or psychological empirical methods to further explore the specific impact mechanism of audiovisual language on emotional experience.

References

- [1] Li, Y. and Cao, J. (2025) The delayed "truth-mystery": An analysis of the types and variations of Spanish suspense thriller films. *Film Literature*, (9), 13–16.
- [2] Zhang, H. (2024) The application of color in film visual narrative. *The Artist*, (11), 158–160.
- [3] Ammer, S.M.E.I. (2021) Content analysis of lighting and color in the embodiment of fear concept in horror movies: A semiotic approach. *Information Sciences Letters*, 9(2), 135–142.
- [4] Kovsh, O. and Dziuba, M. (2022) Symbolism of color in cinema. *Bulletin of Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts. Series in Audiovisual Art and Production*, 5, 207–215.
- [5] Shen, Q. (2022) The art of film and television scene combination: Analysis of the movie *The Invisible Guest* from the perspective of scene montage. *Drama House*, (6), 155–156.
- [6] Bente, G., Kryston, K., Jahn, N.T. et al. (2022) Building blocks of suspense: Subjective and physiological effects of narrative content and film music. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 9, Article 449.
- [7] Nummenmaa, L. (2021) Psychology and neurobiology of horror movies. *PsyArXiv Preprints*.
- [8] Yilmaz, M.B., Lotman, E., Karjus, A. and Tikka, P. (2023) An embodiment of the cinematographer: Emotional and perceptual responses to different camera movement techniques. *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, 17, Article 1160843.
- [9] Luo, L. (2022) Research and application of montage thinking techniques in modern films. *Ming Jia Ming Zuo*, (16), 51–53.