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# *The Presentation and Impact of Feminist Cinema: A Case Study of the Films There Is Still Tomorrow and Suffragette*

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***Abstract.*** This article takes the films *There Is Still Tomorrow and Suffragette* as research objects, and adopts literature analysis, film text analysis and comparative research methods to explore the presentation and social impact of feminist cinema from the perspective of audio-visual language, narrative structure and the portrayal of female characters. The study finds that both films use high-angle and low-angle shots to depict woman's oppression and the shifts in their status, though their visual styles are different: the former adopts a black-and-white neo-realist style, and the latter adopts a realistic retro tone. Narratively, *Suffragette* shows awakening and collective struggle with a linear causal structure, while *There Is Still Tomorrow* leads private life to the public political issue of women's suffrage through daily cycles and suspense settings. Both films use sisterhood and mother-daughter relationships to promote the formation of women's subject consciousness. Although the two films have similarities and differences in audio-visual language and narrative strategies, they both show the survival dilemma and awakening process of women in the family, workplace and society. It reveals the bondage of the traditional gender order on women, and reflects the importance of women's subject consciousness and equal rights. Research suggests that feminist films help construct women's subjective consciousness and spark public discussion on gender equality, but their social impact is conditional. Meanwhile, the development of feminist films still faces the challenge of uneven distribution of creative resources. This article aims to provide reference for understanding the artistic expression and social value of feminist films.

***Keywords:*** feminist cinema, *There Is Still Tomorrow, Suffragette,* female subject consciousness

## 1. Introduction

With the continuous development of feminist thought and the continuous attention to gender equality issues, film, as a medium with both artistic expression and social communication functions, has gradually become an important carrier for presenting women's survival situation, reflecting on traditional gender order and spreading feminist ideas. Traditional films have inherent stereotypes regarding female characters. Female characters are typically portrayed as selfless wives and perfect mothers who dedicate themselves to men. The characters presented are mostly weak individuals

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with low social status [1]. However, feminist films try to change this way of expression. Through the innovation of women's perspective, characterization, audio-visual language and narrative structure, it presents the real situation of women in the family, workplace and public society, and explores the formation of women's subject consciousness and its impact on gender relations in society. The term 'subject construction' refers to narrative construction that centers on women—that is, the creation and production of film and television works from a feminist perspective [2]. Therefore, studying how feminist films depict the predicaments and struggles of women, as well as the possible social impacts of such depictions, is of great significance for understanding the relationship between film art and gender concepts.

This article takes the films *There Is Still Tomorrow* and *Suffragette* as the research objects, exploring the presentation of those feminist films and their influence. The two films are set in post-World War II Italy and the early 20th century Britain respectively. Starting from the life experiences of ordinary women, they depict the gender oppression that women faced in family relationships, working environments and public political sphere, as well as their gradual establishment of self-awareness and pursuit of equal rights. Although the two films differ in terms of their time settings, narrative styles and visual styles, they both link the individual destinies of women with political awakening and female liberation, providing specific examples for comparing the expression methods of feminist films based on different historical contexts.

Regarding research methods, firstly, relevant literature on feminist film theory, female image studies and film visual language is reviewed to establish a theoretical foundation for film analysis. Secondly, the film text analysis method is adopted to conduct specific analyses of the camera angles, picture styles, narrative structures, character relationships, and key plots in the two films, exploring how film visual language and narrative participate in the shaping of female images and the expression of female consciousness. On this basis, through comparative research methods, the commonalities and differences in visual presentation, narrative strategies, and theme expression of the two films are analyzed. Then, the significance and limitations of feminist films in the construction of female subject consciousness, the reflection of the audience's gender concept and the development of feminist film creation are further discussed.

This study compares *There Is Still Tomorrow* and *Suffragette* to examine how feminist films present women through visual language, narrative strategies and characterization. It clarifies how the films transform the individual life experiences of women into reflections on gender power relations and social systems, and explores its significance in promoting the establishment of female subject consciousness and expanding public discussions on gender equality. This paper hopes to further explore the connection between the artistic expression and social impact of feminist cinema, while also discussing the constraints faced by feminist cinema in both creative production and the film industry, thereby, providing some references for understanding the expression characteristics, social value, and future development direction of contemporary feminist films.

## 2. Audiovisual language in two films: camera angles and visual style

### 2.1. Similarities in camera angles

As part of the visual language of film, the camera angle, otherwise known as view point, is the angle subtended at the lens by the main subject in the picture area. The high angle shot with the camera pointed from a high elevation looking down a character denotes submissiveness, humiliation, vulnerability, powerlessness or being beaten down; a low angle shot with the camera looking up enhances the character's stature as big, powerful, imposing, menacing, authoritative or dominant [3].

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Both of the two films adopted the change of camera angles to depict the transformation of the main characters from the beginning to the end of the story.

At the beginning of both films, when women are in a situation of oppression by men, the director often uses a high-angle shot to film the women, symbolizing their lack of power, while employing a low-angle shot to film the male oppressors. In the film *There Is Still Tomorrow*, the protagonist, Delia, is filmed from a high angle in an underground space, with people even walking across the foreground at eye level. The same shooting angle is also used in the early part of the film *Suffragette*. Conversely, when depicting male characters, directors typically use low-angle shots to convey a sense of oppression to the audience and highlight the male characters' power. As both films approach their conclusions—after the protagonists have fought for women's suffrage and their social status has changed—the directors begin to use high-angle shots to frame the female leads. This shift in camera angle vividly illustrates evolution of women's rights and political awakening. Thus, the two directors' approaches to camera angles are very similar.

### 2.2. *There Is Still Tomorrow:* black-and-white visual style

The first eight and a half minutes of the film adopt a 4:3 frame, which is a tribute to the image style of Neorealism, and then return to the 16:9 frame which the audience is familiar with. Through the change of the size ratio, *There Is Still Tomorrow* has achieved a historical dialogue with Italian Neorealism in aesthetic form [4]. Italian Neorealism represents the phenomenon that the younger generation wants to stand out from the old Italian film conventions, giving birth to a number of widely recognized Italian films such as The Earth Trembles, Rome, Open City, and The Bicycle Thief. Neo-realism films are usually full of silent power and strong emotions. They do not preach or explain, but just observe. The film *There Is Still Tomorrow* uses the same technique, which vividly embody the concept of Italian Neorealism of "reflecting society through reality and using resistance to foster art."

Italian Neorealism follows the principle of "looking for light, not manipulating light", and director Paula's use of natural light is also aligns with some of the ideas of Italian Neorealism. However, during the filming of the movie, in addition to the capture of natural light, part of the artificial light is also used, and the aesthetics is significantly updated [4]. Specifically, the director presents the life situation of the heroine in an objective way at the beginning of the film, making the audience feel that Delia is busy and depressed. Paula deliberately uses visual techniques to let sunlight shine into what would otherwise be a small, dark space. Although the whole film is black and white, the audience can still see the strong contrast in tonal values created by the light streaming in through the window. This visual presentation is also used in the subsequent scene when Delia meets the U. S. military. Director Paula repeatedly injects sunlight into the dark environment, giving light and hope to the sorrowful things. Instead of immersing the audience in suffering, she gives the audience a snorkeling tube, as if allowing us to breathe air even while our bodies are submerged in water. Through such cinematography and visual style, the subjectivity and action of the characters are emphasized, and the intention of "sunshine" also symbolizes hope.

### 2.3. *Suffragette:* realistic cinematic style

If There Will Be Tomorrow uses black-and-white visuals to achieve a dialogue between different times, then *Suffragette* visually employs a realistic approach, restoring the retro tone of the film to evoke the tiredness of the industrial era's dusty atmosphere, transporting the audience to this "historical scene". When depicting the scenes of the laundry workers' work and the streets, the

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visuals are usually in a cold color scheme of gray, green, and blue. Female workers' faces are faintly visible in the thick fog, this blurring treatment implies the invisibility of them as individuals. At the same time, the heat wave of steam and dull tones create a depressing atmosphere, symbolizing the situation of women - low and humble. When the second half of the film, the heroine is homeless and can only live in a dim church temporarily. At this time, the only light source in the picture is a candle, but the tone changes to warm yellow. The yellow light of the candle hits the face and the letter, symbolizing that the only hope in the extremely destructive and low-level situation is the pursuit of women's equal rights.

## 3. Differences and similarities in the narrative structures of two films

Both films take women's life experiences as the narrative center, linking gender oppression with the history of women's struggle for rights, but their narrative structure is different: *Suffragette* centers on the characters' awakening, employing a linear, cause-and-effect narrative. Through the continuous escalation of contradictions and conflicts, the protagonist is promoted from daily life to collective struggle. *There Is Still Tomorrow*, on the other hand, uses everyday life as the foundation of its narrative. Through repetitive scenes, it gradually reveals the oppression of the family and the situation of Italian women at that time, and creates suspense at the end, turning the protagonist's private life into a broader public political issue: women's suffrage.

### 3.1. *Suffragette: a* narrative with a linear causal structure

*Suffragette* dating back to the first decades of the twentieth, when, under the pressure of working-class insurgency and the need for a more productive workforce, the capitalist class in England began a social reform that transformed not only the factory but the community and the home and, first and foremost, the social position of women [5]. Male authorities at the time believed that working in factories robbed women of their ability to handle household affairs. Consequently, they sought to significantly increase the proportion of male worker and deprive women of the right to work. *Suffragette* focuses on the experience of Maud Watts， uses the story of an ordinary woman's gradual journey toward political activism to reflect the history of the British women's political participation movement in this historical background.

Overall, the film can be divided into three interconnected narrative stages. The first stage presents the oppression of daily life and work. Through Maud's factory labor and family life, the film reflects the gender order she inhabits. At this time, political activity has not yet become her central concern. The second stage is political awakening and the escalation of action, as Maud gradually comes into contact with the women's suffrage movement, participates in protests, and encounters punishment. At this point, political action conflicts with family, work, and social relations, and these conflicts push the character toward increasingly definite choices. The third stage is the intertwining of personal destiny and history, weaving Maud's individual fate together with the historical significance of the suffrage movement. The ending places the character's experience within a broader political history, achieving a thematic elevation. Thus, the film forms a progressive narrative structure that moves from daily oppression to awakening consciousness to collective struggle and historical reflection, driven by the continuous escalation of the character's actions and conflicts.

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### 3.2. *There Is Still Tomorrow:* narrative structures based on daily cycles and suspense creation

*Suffragette* takes the gradual escalation of political actions as the main narrative driving force, but the more important narrative structure feature of *There Is Still Tomorrow* is to organize repetitive daily life, suspenseful plots and historical endings. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Italian feminists began to fight for women's rights. During the Fascist era (1922-1943), the Mussolini regime confined women to private sphere as 'mother and wife', using laws to restrict women's access to education, employment and political participation， realizing the dual discipline of women's space and rights [6]. The outbreak of World War II and the collapse of the Fascist regime made Italian women go out of the private sphere and participate in social production and anti-fascist struggle, laying the practical foundation for their rights. This historical background has become the core narrative context of *There Is Still Tomorrow* [7]. Set in the background of Italy after the war in 1946, it revolves around Delia's family life, and adopts a narrative structure that combines the cyclical nature of daily life and suspense, gradually leads women's private difficulties to public political issues. At the beginning of the film, the film establishes a closed and repetitive life order through Delia's domestic chores, family relationships and her experience of her husband's violence and control, so as to reveal the routine and continuity of patriarchal oppression. And with the help of black-and-white cinematography, comedic elements and rhythmic performances, it strengthens the absurdity and oppression of daily life. Among them, the scene of "domestic violence tango" uses the fixed rhythm of tango as a metaphor to represent the regularity and cyclical nature of domestic violence. It transforms the husband's violent actions and Delia's dodging actions into a stylized dance posture. Through the 'aesthetic transformation of violence', it dissipates the visual impact of domestic violence and avoids falling into 'the spectacle display of female suffering' [7]. As the plot unfolds, the film introduces changes in the repeated life scenes through Delia's relationship with her daughter, neighbors and other members of society, as well as her gradually emerging behavioral motivations, so that the main consciousness of the characters gradually emerges. At the same time, the film uses information delay and suspense settings to temporarily retain the real purpose of Delia's action, simply guiding the audience continuously follow the protagonist's action. In the final scene, it was not until Delia walked towards the crowd that the mystery was finally revealed - Delia's action was for women's votes. Through the scene of Delia going to the polling station, the film shifts the narrative from the family to the public political narrative- specifically, the 1946 Italian republican referendum and related elections. Meanwhile, it also reveals that women's liberation not only involves changes in personal lives, but also is closely related to political rights. At this point, the film has formed a narrative chain from describing Delia's daily oppression, to the gradual manifestation of her intention to the expression of her political intention. Through the cycles of daily life and the suspense and twists created by the end, it shows the formation of the protagonist's subjective consciousness and its connection with social and historical changes.

### 3.3. Common elements in narratives

Although the two films differ in narrative structure, there are many similarities in the portrayal of the heroine. Both films start from an individual woman's perspective. Without a grand superhero-style narrative, the directors objectively present the women's family and working lives: they earn lower wages than men, take care of the daily lives and well-being of everyone in the family, and remain under their husbands' authority for a long time. At this point, none of them realizes that they need to awaken and resist.

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However, feminist films often challenge the male privileges of traditional films through sisterhood and mother-daughter relationships. Good sisterhood can help female characters in a disadvantaged position avoid being rescued by men [8]. In this two films, the characters who subtly spurred their feminist awakening were, interestingly, both women: Marissa, who talks without reservation with Delia and slanders Delia's husband., she tells Delia that she can leave and find new life; as well as Edith and Violet, the pharmacists in *Suffragette* who constantly fight for women's rights, and Emily, who charged onto the racetrack, staining the flag with her blood. The women around these female protagonists in feminist films demonstrate a completely different female temperament from the traditional male perspective. Female characters can be kind, beautiful, or selfish, and aggressive [8].

Furthermore, the mother-daughter relationship in the films symbolizes a female figure who breaks free from patriarchal consciousness [8]. In the two films, the portrayal of the direct mother-daughter relationship and the portrayal of the indirect mother-daughter relationship became the trigger for the awakening of the protagonist in the film. Specifically, the two directors' portrayal of "the resonance of fate between mother and daughter" is similar. In *There Is Still Tomorrow*, the daughter's interactions with her boyfriend reminds Delia of her behaviors with her husband before marriage. At the same time, Delia notices that her daughter's boyfriend exhibited similar possessiveness and controlling tendencies as her husband. In *Suffragette*, Maud asks his husband what kind of fate it would be if they had a daughter, and he replied: "The same as Maud." This similar family narrative makes both female protagonists realize that if they do not resist, their descendants could only retrace their own tragic paths. And the female characters around them further strengthen their determination to fight against traditional male rights. In summary, both films take women at the bottom of society who have no sense of independence as the starting point of narrative, focusing on portraying and exploring how the protagonists of the film gradually form a feminist consciousness in the specific events of the sister and mother-daughter relationship.

## 4. The value and impact of women's awakening in feminist cinema

### 4.1. The establishment of female subject consciousness and the reflection on the traditional gender order

The awakening of feminist consciousness not only signifies women's renewed understanding of their own circumstances, but also means questioning and resisting the traditional gender order. In movies, female resistance includes women's acts of refusal and organized against unfair labor roles set by patriarchy and capitalism. This includes rejecting traditional domestic roles, fighting against bodily and economic control, and seeking independence through political or social action [5]. *Suffragette* puts the awakening of women's consciousness in an open political struggle. From the initial hesitation and obedience, Maud gradually turned to actively participate in suffrage movement, illustrating the process of women from individual resistance to collective action. In contrast, in the narrative context of the film *There Is Still Tomorrow*, the expression of female resistance is more implicit. Delia has been bound by domestic violence and gender norms for a long time, and her life is restricted by family roles such as wife and mother. However, as the story progresses, she gradually realizes that she is not merely a passive subject who can only obey the authority of the family, but an individual with independent will and the right to choose. Through her final participation in voting, the film links the awakening of personal consciousness with women's collective struggle for social rights. The two films respectively approach the topic from family life and public politics, revealing that the oppression of women is not simply due to personal experiences, but is closely related to social systems and traditional gender concepts. Therefore, the

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awakening of women's consciousness is not only the establishment of individual subjectivity, but also a reflection on the existing power relationship.

### 4.2. The social impact of feminist cinema and the audience's awareness

The significance of feminist films is to present the long-neglected female experience through images and bring gender inequality into the public discussion. Laura Mulvey criticized the male gaze in traditional films in Visual Pleasure and Narrative Films, pointing out that classic narrative films often put men in the position of active viewers, while women are easily the object of viewing [9]. This theory provides an important perspective for analyzing the dominant position of women in films. There Is S till Tomorrow prompts the audience to re-examine the connection between marital relationships, family power and women's independent choice through daily oppression within the family; *Suffragette* highlights the necessity of collective action by depicting the sacrifices women have faced in pursuit of political rights. Both films attempt to break away from the traditional portrayal that confines women to passive roles, making women the main characters and allowing them to promote narrative development and make independent choices.

However, the influence of movies on social concepts is not necessarily happening. The film can provide the audience with a perspective to understand gender issues and stimulate reflection on reality, but the audience's cultural background, social environment and personal experience will also affect their acceptance. Therefore, the social value of feminist films is not only to express women's plight, but also to provide space for continuous discussion on gender equality issues.

## 5. The practical challenges and development potential of feminist cinema

Despite the continuous development of feminist films, the progress in on-screen expression does not mean that the film industry has achieved gender equality, the film industry continues to exhibit systemic biases, necessitating further structural changes [10]. The European Women's Audiovisual Network released a research report comparing the film industry in seven European countries from 2006 to 2013. The report pointed out that about 21% of the films directed by female directors in the sample countries, while the national film funding received by female directors accounted for about 16%, reflecting that women still face restrictions on creative opportunities and resource allocation.

In addition, feminist expression may also be influenced by business logic. When women's topics are only used as propaganda labels to attract audiences, without deeply presenting the social structure and real dilemmas of women, movies tend to stay on the surface of female empowerment. Therefore, the development of feminist films not only requires increasing the visibility of female characters, but also needs to pay attention to the expression space of female creators, the complexity of female characterization, and the presentation of women's experiences from different social backgrounds.

## 6. Conclusion

Through the comparative analysis of the films "*There Is Still Tomorrow*" and "*Suffragette*", it is not difficult to find that feminist films present women's survival difficulties, consciousness awakening and the pursuit of rights through audio-visual language, narrative structure and characterization. Although the two films have differences in visual style and narrative methods, they both link women's personal experiences with gender issues, showing the significance of women's struggle for independence and equality. At the same time, the social influence of feminist films is still

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constrained by factors such as audience perception and industry environment. Therefore, in the future, feminist film creations should pay more attention to the diversity and complexity of women's experiences, further expand opportunities for women to express themselves, and promote continued public discussion of gender equality issues.

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