

Analysis of the Dual Subject Identity Cognitive Construction Mechanism in 100 Flowers Hidden Deep Based on Lacanian Three Worlds Theory

Zhiyu Luo^{1,a,*}

¹Sichuan University Jiang'an Campus, Chuan Da Road, Shuangliu District, Chengdu, China

a. 1064044240@qq.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: Chen Kaige's short film *100 Flowers Hidden Deep* guided by the theme of "moving house" serves as a narrative thread, portraying the inner struggles of a modern individual faced with conflicts between tradition and modernity. This conflict not only exists within the protagonist's inner world but also permeates society, leading the film's characters to exhibit different attitudes and behaviors when confronted with various dilemmas. This paper explores how the unique character configurations in the film, hidden beneath the clash of tradition and modernity, project onto Lacan's Three Worlds Theory, offering a fresh interpretation from a film text analysis perspective on the Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic worlds. Starting from the dilemma of the self and the other, this paper interprets the existence and forms of the self across different dimensions, attempting to decipher how the film text constructs the journey of self-recognition for both the protagonist and the audience in a symbolic and psychoanalytic world. This analysis is an integral part of psychoanalytic studies, with profound implications for film text analysis. The film not only provides a new interpretation of character settings and plot arrangements but also offers essential theoretical support for film production and audience comprehension. *100 Flowers Hidden Deep* by Chen Kaige demonstrates the importance and value of Lacan's Three Worlds Theory in film text analysis.

Keywords: Lacan, Psychoanalysis, *100 Flowers Hidden Deep*, Subject Construction, Film Theory

1. Introduction

In 2002, the Cannes International Film Festival aimed to showcase the highest artistic standards of contemporary world cinema. Fifteen master-level directors were specially invited to produce ten-minute microfilms centered around the theme of "the passage of time," which were later combined into a 150-minute film as the opening feature. Among these directors, Chen Kaige, representing the Chinese film industry, directed a microfilm titled *100 Flowers Hidden Deep*, which tells the story of an elderly Beijing resident, Mr. Feng, seeking the assistance of movers to help him "move house." The core plot of the film, viewed in its entirety, is not overly intricate but holds a deep fascination. This is because the alley where Mr. Feng's "house" in the Hundred Flowers Deep lies does not actually exist in real life. On one side, there's the eccentric insistence on moving, and on the other, a group of actors

who will do anything for money, each party fulfilling its own needs, leading to an absurd comedy of a simulated house move.

Such a narrative carries a vague metaphorical sense for the theme of self-recognition, separating the audience and the moving crew from Mr. Feng. Each of them stands in their own individual circumstances, entangled in the inducements of the other. [1] To comprehend the true nature of the subjects and the logic of cognitive subject construction, it is necessary to combine Lacan's frameworks of the Imaginary, the Real, and the Symbolic. This enables an understanding of Mr. Feng, lost from the perspective of the small other within the film, and the moving crew and even the audience, formed under the gaze of the big other.

2. The Disorientation of Ideal Self-Construction

The timing of the film's opening is quite ingenious, occurring during the turn of the century when China became the focal point of expression. Beijing, as the capital of the 21st century, was thriving with towering skyscrapers and bustling streets, exuding a profound sense of modernity. Low-angle shots and a series of tracking shots effectively immerse the audience, establishing a delicate balance and a sense of identification amid the oppressiveness and disorientation.

The entrance of Mr. Feng and the moving crew once again highlights the backdrop of changing times. Mr. Feng is portrayed as gentle, courteous, and a true Beijinger with his distinctive local accent and traditional attire, exuding a strong sense of tradition. He ardently adheres to traditional beliefs, regarding them as standards and truths, thereby constructing his "correct" identity, the ideal mirror image in the realm of the Imaginary—the traditional and contented old Beijinger. However, he is also shielded from the harsh realities of scarcity; the Hundred Flowers Alley is reduced to ruins, and even traces of tradition are gradually disappearing. [2]

In this scenario, the passionate Mr. Feng, in the eyes of others, becomes a madman living in the past, immersing himself in the unconscious, "striving for a better self. However, the mirror need not be a true reflection. The words of those around us can influence us, becoming a mirror. The image they shape becomes the 'ideal self,' strengthening the idealized self-image." [3] This is similar to what Lacan calls the "mirror stage" of an infantile self-love projection, also known as the small other.

As the instigator of desire reinforcement and the reinforcement of misrecognition in the mirror, playing the role of constructing the ideal self, Mr. Feng's unwavering commitment to tradition and a dignified desire transforms into a form of psychological abnormality and expectation. The alley scenes of the Hundred Flowers Deep in his memories are Mr. Feng's recollections and fantasies of the past, desires for a world full of vitality, and the construction and identification with an idealized world and space. The small other influences him and subsequently gains control over his body, pushing the original "self" into the corner, no longer manifest in real life.

In the film, as Mr. Feng sits in the car with the movers, driving through the unfamiliar "Beijing city" where he grew up, the vast and mixed distant views shatter his expectations at that moment, giving rise to a sense of "not fitting in." [4] However, he ultimately fails to critically examine the desires and expectations linked to the virtual image, instead choosing to conform to the image itself, rejecting the notion that every crossroads presents new scenery. In a rapidly advancing modern society, finding the right path for traditional culture to integrate into the metropolis and exhibit new life and vitality in the correct way is a subject that requires deep contemplation and exploration by us all.

3. The Societal Self-Recognition through Gaze

In the Symbolic realm, the other holds a fundamental position, and the subject's identification in the Symbolic places itself in this position of alterity. [5] Most of the time, we exist within the Symbolic.

It is a world filled with rules and constraints, where people often feel lost and unhappy. It is a world saturated with the "desires of others." [6]

In the rapidly developing era of 20th-century China, with increased economic capabilities and widespread internet penetration, everyone is moving at a fast pace. New urban areas are being constructed, old urban areas are demolished, and changes in living arrangements have caused people to spontaneously move into the concrete jungle. Money has become the primary topic of conversation for everyone and an integral part of life.

As Baudrillard notes, in post-industrial societies (mainly referring to post-World War II Europe), labor is no longer the object of exploitation by capitalists or capitalist alienation; consumption has become the carrier that takes its place. [7] Consumption has become symbolic, often pointing to deceptive symbols composed of various concepts, and it sometimes influences people to act impulsively and become slaves to the symbols, striving to earn more for the capitalists. [8]

In the film, the mover says, "Sure, we'll do any job for money," directly portraying the emotional emphasis on material desires in the context of modern consumerism, and it hints at a satirical take on the characteristics of the era by the director. The audience outside the screen, guided by the camera and dialogue, is similarly exposed to the symbolic order of social consumerism and grants their approval. The shift of the line delivered by the mover can substitute one signifier for another, the "values of consumer society," and undergo a transformation, effectively operating in this cultural chain.

In the car scene, Mr. Feng attempts to look outside and observe this "foreign" city where he grew up, but the distant and panoramic views create a resonance of "not fitting in" for the audience, shared with Mr. Feng. However, this action clearly violates traffic laws. "Don't stick your head out; don't let the police see you. You want to cause trouble?" In doing so, the audience, who was observing the city led by the camera, even experiences a kind of anxiety that is not typical in daily life; the small other has appeared. This clearly demonstrates the lack of desires in the process of urbanization, or rather, the small other is the reason for people's desires. The small other is, first of all, a cause that arouses desire, due to the irreducible gap between the Symbolic and the Real, where each symbolization generates a surplus—the object a. It is eternally lost, an impossible object, the deprived Phallus, a constitutive exception of desire. Therefore, it becomes the cause of desire and something that the subject in the framework of illusion continually seeks through the replacement of objects.

Just like "Zhuangzi's Butterfly Dream," Zhuangzi's dream within a dream is the butterfly's dream, which shares the same structure. Zhuangzi did not gain anything from the content of this dream; he simply woke up directly. However, this anxiety does not last for long. Although the film's visual language and symbolism are performed, under the reminder in the mover's dialogue, the subject only briefly experiences identity construction and recognition. Under the impact, they briefly realize the existence of anxiety but immediately return to the discipline. Individuals continue to exist within the scene unconsciously operated under the gaze of the other, inevitably subject to Symbolic loss, including the audience, contributing to alienation.

4. The Transcendence of the Ideal Self

The climax of the film undoubtedly focuses on the process of "moving house," where the director meticulously records the scene of moving "house" through long takes. This scene is purely generated within a metaphorical world of symbols. Under the Symbolic order, the movers and the audience outside the fourth wall fail to grasp the true nature of Mr. Feng's world, driven by ideal self-orientation.

In this scene, the movers sneer at the meticulous arrangement of the room as a mere farce, contrasting it with the orderly disposition of rooms that the older generation appreciates. There is no shortage of unreal objects matched with actual sound effects, adding an element of absurdity and enhancing the interpretative nature of the visuals. Why has the leisurely culture of the past transformed

overnight into a fast-paced consumer society, where people rush around for money and a livelihood, unable to deeply appreciate such beauty, taking on a tragic quality?

The turning point of the entire film is arranged when the movers accidentally "break" Mr. Feng's "lampstand" from his fantasies. The workers, from a perspective of human sympathy, show a hint of care for his self, but as Mr. Feng reminds them of the impending ditch ahead, a close-up shot captures the moment the car truly gets stuck, gradually revealing the truth of the situation. Part of the bell that Mr. Feng repeatedly mentions is discovered, buried in the soil. It seems that at that moment, the movers see Mr. Feng's "home" as he described.

At this moment, the order formed under the gaze of the big other is suspended, and the audience, along with the worker subject, begins to question. The Symbolic order appears to reveal an inherent crack that cannot be entirely symbolized at this moment. The truth of the subject points to the void of desire itself, with the subject merely desiring within desire, with even the origin of this connection being advised by the other. The externalization of Mr. Feng's understanding of the Hundred Flowers Deep alley becomes a combination of the real and the ideal form of his "ideal self," allowing the desire process influenced by the other's advice to temporarily escape from alienation and establish a coherent ethical identity in an unreachable place in the Real.

In reality, within the expression of the image and reality, it reflects the inevitable "Sphinx's riddle" in the process of traditional and modernization that makes us want to seek ourselves, but we are always playing in solitude, even lost under the gaze of the big other. The movers and the audience, sharing the same perspective, are momentarily suspended in the net of symbolic construction, touching the inner "primitive," reminding the subject of their lack and incompleteness in reality.

In the open-ended conclusion, Mr. Feng shakes the bell and runs into the distance, departing within the depth provided by the long-shot. His future and where he is headed remain unknown. The dialectical unity of the subject's consciousness of the "ideal self" and "self" is presented. The "ultimate ideal self" takes control of the body, becoming the subject's "self-consciousness," and creates a new "ideal self" that continually progresses, realizing the new home he envisioned.

5. Conclusion

The film "Baihua Deep" by director Chen Kaige stands as a highly subjective and intentional representative work. It profoundly illustrates the concerns of the turn of the century regarding economic development, modern urbanization, and the preservation of traditional culture. Additionally, the film's narrative design is quite ingenious. Grounded in Lacan's Three Orders theory, it's evident how the subject navigates the complex entanglement of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real world in the film. Whether it's Mr. Feng, whom many perceive as eccentric, seeking a new path through the dialectics of the ideal self and self-awareness, or the audience itself, influenced by social norms and the director's cinematic language and environment, temporarily transcending under the impact of Mr. Feng's "ideal self," touching upon the primitive, understanding the subject's deficiency, and ultimately establishing a coherent ethical identity in the Real.

In summary, this film consistently explores a new character setting and dimension, providing unique and novel value to psychoanalysis and text analysis. In just ten minutes, it offers a unique expression of personal thought that reveals the intertwining of the virtual and the real, the inheritance of history and reality, as well as a delicate and complex nostalgia for the past. It tells the audience a seemingly crazy but not insane nostalgic story.

References

- [1] Cui, J., & Shu, L. (2021). *Insights and limitations of Jacques Lacan's "Three Worlds Theory" on ideological theory.* *World Philosophy*, 2021(1).

- [2] Bian, Y. (2021). Where do a hundred flowers bloom, and where does the beloved return? A brief analysis of Chen Kaige's *100 Flowers Hidden Deep*. *Modern and Ancient Literary Creation*, 2021(35).
- [3] Yang, F. (2022). Lost and Found: The Construction of Father-Son Subjectivity in the Light of Jacques Lacan's Three Worlds Theory in "Sunshine Enlightenment." *Art Research*, 2022(3).
- [4] Xia, G., & Hu, Y. (2017). An Analysis of the Aesthetic Characteristics of the Microfilm *100 Flowers Hidden Deep*. *Art and Technology*, 2017(12).
- [5] Wu, Q. (2011). *Jacques Lacan Reads Your Symptoms*. Beijing: China Renmin University Press.
- [6] Baudrillard, J. (2014). *The Consumer Society* (C. Turner, Trans.). Nanjing: Nanjing University Press.
- [7] Li, X. (2014). *Introduction to Lacan*. Chongqing: Chongqing University Press.
- [8] Yin, L. The Construction of Bionic Subjectivity in the Three Worlds Perspective of Jacques Lacan: A Case Study of K in "Blade Runner 2049." *Journal Title, Volume*.