



A Probe into the Space Narration of Nolan's Films—Taking “Dunkirk” as an Example

Jiaxin Yang

Faculty of Arts, Cheongju University, Cheongju, Chungcheong-buk do, South Korea.

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Corresponding author: Jiaxin Yang, Faculty of Arts, Cheongju University, Cheongju, Chungcheong-buk do, South Korea.

Abstract

“Dunkirk” (hereinafter referred to as Dunkirk), a new film directed by Christopher Nolan, has been highly praised since it was released in China in early September, with the score of the latest Douban as high as 8.7. This is Nolan's first masterpiece on the subject of war. The overall film viewing experience can be summarized as "constant tension and horror". As director Nolan said, "For me, the most unique part of Dunkirk's story is the sense of suspense. I didn't shoot it as a war movie, but as a suspense thriller". In this sense, it is not so much a war film as a disaster film full of psychological fears and thrillers. The sudden attack and death, and the thriller atmosphere form a powerful force field, which makes soldiers and even cinema audiences feel nervous. So, where are the elements that constitute and sustain this sustained tension? From the perspective of film creation, the author believes that the core narrative strategy of the film is to deal with the situation and situation, the absence of the main German army, time reset and complex audio-visual composition.

Keywords

War films, Dunkirk, Soldiers

1. Suspicious description of absence

Throughout the 107 minute screening time of the whole film, only when Farrell, the British pilot, was captured, the background was outside the depth of field, and there was no German footage. Such a "absent" creativity or expression method of the main party of the war was rare in war movies. Obviously, it was an important part of Nolan's idea, it is also the core element of maintaining persistent tension (Chinese Film Week: War Films, 2022).

1.1 Absence enhances the sense of substitution

The absence of the enemy and the enemy has changed the narrative perspective from the omniscient perspective of general war movies to the brought in perspective. It can be imagined that every soldier who flees in a panic on Dunkirk Beach can not directly see or contact the German army, but can only perceive the smell of death through the sudden explosion, the sound of bullets hitting the human body, the terrible "Shepard" sound effect of enemy aircraft diving, and the cry for help from soldiers who abandon ships and jump into the sea, The inexplicable fear always envelops everyone's heart. Later, Nolan confirmed this in the interview: "In order to create the audience's sense of being in the scene, I don't show the enemy's face. In this way, we feel threatened as if we are soldiers on the beach. I think it's more terrible to not see the enemy's face. I let the audience feel this clearly." Similarly, the fear and horror of the audience are constantly strengthened from the gray and blue depressing tone of the visual environment, the deafening explosion and the performance of each actor. I don't know what tragedy will happen next. This is also the effect that director Nolan wants.

1.2 Absence highlights local suspense

The formation and movement of local suspense is the basis of film rhythm change and the driving factor of plot relaxation. Due to the absence of the German army, when and where the officers and soldiers on Dunkirk Beach will be hit suddenly, and in what way they will be attacked, is always unknown, which is different from the bright spot of both sides of the war. The people in the play and the audience are lack of effective psychological preparation (Brewer M F., 2021). Once attacked, the psychological impact will be multiplied. For example, in the scene at the beginning of the film, several seemingly defeated British soldiers walk aimlessly in the streets of the decadent urban area where the surrender leaflets are falling. At the moment when Tommy, the main character, tries to reach out for a cigarette butt, an unknown cold gun breaks the silence and opens the tense sequence. Then the bullets hit Tommy's companions one after another, and Tommy, who is quick, leaps over a door to survive. This sudden attack made the audience's heart suddenly hang. I don't know what will happen next. No wonder some audience said after watching the film, "The opening was about to cry with fear. The gunfire and gunfire were so lifelike that they felt like they were exploding on their own heads". Similar situations are reflected in the trestle bombing at the 27th minute of the film and the sudden attack of German torpedoes by British ships at the 40th minute.

1.3 Absence highlights dramatic turn

William Archer, a famous British drama theorist, pointed out in his Drama Act that "the essence of drama is a radical change. To a greater or lesser extent, it is always a radical change in the development of fate or environment, and a drama scene is a radical change within the general upheaval that obviously pushes the whole fundamental event forward." From this point of view, a sudden change or transition is the basis for the formation of dramatic tension, and also the key to catch people in the work. The meaning of a sudden change or transition is to break the psychological expectations of the people and audience in the play, and gain dramatic meaning and psychological pleasure in the sudden transition. Combined with this film, it is precisely because of the lack of seats in the German army that the unexpected blow is more unexpected, which increases the suspense and thrilling color, and makes the development of the plot twists and turns. From the perspective of plot development, Dun does not have too many twists and turns and fantasies. The cross editing of air cover, sea rescue and ground evacuation constitutes the main plot, which again and again arouses the audience's psychological expectations for its smooth boarding and evacuation. However, each time, it is broken by unexpected attacks. This huge gap of emotion is based on the absence of the play function.

1.4 Expressive power of absent extended voice

As a war movie without any enemies appearing, the most direct fear of death of the characters and audience in the movie mainly comes from the auditory experience. As far as this film is concerned, the roaring bullets, the diving aircraft, the sinking of ships, the explosion of bombs, the wailing of wounded soldiers, and the desperate cry for help from the drowning people, etc. Therefore, the use of music and sound effects in this film has reached a high level in the creation of real environments, the setting off of terrorist atmosphere, the accumulation of thriller psychology, and the enhancement of action effects, even surpassing Nolan's famous works "Star Trek" and "Inception". The Mole, written by Hans Zimmer, a German film music master, uses complex orchestrations to interpret a deep, depressing and thrilling tune, plus various unique effects, such as "William Scream", which has been used in the sinking scene for many times, creating a desperate sound; The "Shepard Infinite Syllable" has been used for many times for the psychological fear that gradually escalates when the enemy planes dive bombing, so that every time this sound effect appears, there is a feeling of death coming.

Here, music and sound effects not only shape the real space, but also strengthen the psychological space. From the means of expression to ideographic language, they participate in the drama, highlighting the human theme of the film.

2. Audiovisual impact of time-space reset

2.1 Multi clue narrative constructs space-time logic

The film Dunkirk inherits the consistent tradition of director Christopher Nolan, emphasizing suspense in content, exquisite structure, multi line narrative and exquisite production. The film's three narrative clues, namely, air cover, beach retreat and sea rescue, intersect and parallel, and finally converge. Although the time of the event is not synchronized, the beach retreat is one week, the air battle is one hour, and the sea rescue is one day, the audience's feeling is that the three stories are interrelated and cross advancing, making the three stories seem to happen at the same time. For this reason, he built an "accurate mathematical structure model" at the initial stage of the script, For this model, he ex-

plained in an interview: "In terms of narrative, there are indeed some deep geometric principles and mathematical models that can affect the audience's perception, make them feel a specific feeling, and experience events in a specific way." The core of the model is to use "time and space reset" to break the real time logic, so as to maximize the satisfaction and maintenance of visual tension, which is also the specific embodiment of the director's conception. Then, how can the seamless transition from story time to psychological time be realized? You can see from the following example.

The three line cross cutting of the film is 20 times in 81 minutes before the three lines converge in Dunkirk, which can be divided into two stages. The first stage is the two times of alternating editing of three time and space from the opening to 16 minutes, which basically belongs to the explanation function. The beach boarding retreat is parallel to the departure of the aircraft and the "Moonlight Stone", and the narrative time is real-time; The next 18 times were all due to the fierce exchanges between sunken ships, air combat and maritime rescue, full of intense sense of movement, and the rhythm gradually increased. The narrative time of this stage has been expanded, especially at 15:35, a big perspective shot includes three British gunjets in the air and the "Moonlight Stone" yacht in the sea, and shows that the boat has been off the coast. However, Mr. Dawson's boat actually left the port at 17:05 seconds, and the camera shot of the relationship between the boat and three planes appeared at 42:45 seconds. Obviously, the time sequence presented by these three shots is logically misaligned with the actual action; Another place where pilot Collins's plane was hit by a German plane and forced to make a forced landing at sea (Gowrivel V B, Deepthi R, & Santhosh M K, 2022). This process was seen at 44 minutes and 42 seconds through Farrell's subjective camera on board. However, at 63 minutes, a more detailed forced landing process of the plane's entire sea surface was reproduced. From the two camera performances of this action, the following is a repetition of the previous one, and the time is overlapping. Here again, the "pass through" of time appeared, This is a means and language. It expands psychological time through the repeated use of materials, and achieves the need to strengthen narrative tension and play up the thrilling atmosphere with the help of time reset. Take the passage of saving pilot Collins, which uses three space-time cross clips, including Dawson's boat crash site, Collins slamming the engine room cover and Tommy and others struggling to enter the water cabin in Dunkirk sea area, It is a realistic copy of Griffith's "last minute rescue"; On the other hand, it also makes full use of the audience's psychological expectations to produce a true and breathtaking recognition of the atmosphere (El-Menyawy E M, Nawar H H, & Zedan I T, 2021).

2.2 Vaudeville montage creates suspense

A classic text of juggling montage, the film starts at 87:45 seconds when Farrell's fighter plane ran out of fuel and ends at 13 minutes. It can be said that it is thrilling and suspenseful. This paragraph is also the most lyrical one of the whole film. Director Nolan used 31 scenes (26 air drops to the ground, and 5 pilots are captured by the German army), interspersed with beach soldiers boarding ships, enemy aircraft air strikes until they are shot down. The multiple events and scenes in four different time and space, such as the arrival of the "Moonlight Stone" in Britain, the train that Tommy and others boarded to go home, the evacuation of the last batch of officers at Dunkirk Beach, Dawson's delivery to the Pioneer Newspaper, the activities of people in the train, and the vehicles entering the Waking Station, are obvious. The forced landing of fighter planes at a height of several hundred meters is completely out of step with multiple clues in narrative time. However, the audience was totally immersed in the infection of the situation. This paragraph concentrated on the juggling montage thought of "time and event conflict". In this conflicting paragraph, not only the three narrative themes of brave and meaningless spirit, patriotic feelings and strong life consciousness were interpreted, but also the final suspense was sustained from the film narrative form. Until the end of the film, the audience got a thrilling relief in the whole process of watching the film.

3. The annular closed structure renders the thrilling atmosphere

Looking at the 20 cross narrative paragraphs of beach retreat, maritime rescue and air cover in the first 81 minutes of the film, it is not difficult to find that the director has been continuing the sequence of Dunkirk beach boarding to Mr. Dawson's boat, and then to the parallel and cross of aerial aircraft battle. This sequence has formed an accurate ring structure, which reflects Nolan's concept of "accurate mathematical structure model". It is also important to constantly repeat the thrilling stimulus and suspense settings of "evacuation → rescue → cover → frustration". Although the events and characters in each cycle are different, the final stories come down in one continuous line, realizing the atmosphere of interlocking and danger, maintaining continuous narrative tension and continuous psychological impact on the audience (Hayakawa Y., 2020).

Maintaining the narrative tension continuously is a concrete manifestation of an excellent director's overall control over the story and film language, as well as the audio-visual representation of the director's style. The narrative strategy of Dunkirk may provide a reference for the creation of similar films.

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