

Investigation on the Mediality of Cahiers du Cinéma in the New Wave Period from the Perspective of Material Space Production

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Abstract. From the late 1950s to the early 1960s, New Wave as a film revolution started in France, with the magazine Cahiers du Cinéma as its position at that time, thus forming the "Handbook School" of the director. Its characteristics such as reflecting social reality, challenging traditional narrative, and deviating from the Hollywood model all proved that it was a significant breakthrough in film history. The vigorous spiritual return behind these characteristics was once regarded as the highlight of individualism philosophy, which is also the origin of most studies on Cahiers du Cinéma. However, these studies often dwell on the close reading of the text, which seemingly tells a lot of complicated content but forms the myth of power and relationship. Therefore, the meta-process of meaning space construction needs to be uncovered from scattered rhetoric and explanation, and the investigation of the mediality provides a reliable clue. This perspective starting from the concrete intermediary structure, identity dispatch, and then to the call of connected reality is imaginative to the existentialist practitioners who seem to be unique and independent. When space production is projected into the history continuation and reality evolution, the new wave spreads all over the world. For example, Cahiers du Cinéma inspired Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, Ang Lee, and others to the stage, opening another chapter of Taiwanese films. Coinciding with Sartre's existentialism, author theory, and Bazin's documentary aesthetics shows its unique theoretical bridging value and the construction of media ontology, which is also the theoretical contribution of this paper.

Keywords: New Wave, Mediality, Cahiers du Cinéma, Space Production, Identity.

1. Introduction

As a practice of film and philosophy, the picture of the New Wave is grand. From the perspective of mediality, focusing on the "author theory" and "director-centered system" created by Godard and Truffaut, the development of artistic rhetoric, political identity, and socialization construction has become an inevitable development route. At the same time, individual existentialism is the most important lead. In *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, Richard Neupert affirmed the decisive role of the director in a biographical style.^[1] Peggy Chiao also recognized the "director's creative theory" in her book *French New Wave* and regarded it as the power of "intellectuals sincerely encouraging each other to fight against sinking culture". Meanwhile, she was proud of presenting Taiwanese filmmakers such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang to the forefront of the world.^[2] In addition, from the perspective of modernity research, Mark Cousins pointed out in *The Story of Film* that the New Wave as the French film movement was the cradle of the modernist film rise, which attacked the traditional "quality film" template in the world.^[3] Christine Thompson and David Bodwell who distinguished subjective realism from objective realism connected with Bazan's documentary aesthetics to advocate the meaning paradigm of modernity.^[4]

However, despite the authors' great emphasis on self-presentation, it is undoubtedly narrow-minded to abbreviate the history of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and the New Wave Movement as a personal list of directors. As an important historical witness in this period, *Cahiers du Cinéma* dedicated all the pages of the December 1962 issue to the content about New Wave. This issue, edited by Jacques Doniol Valcroze and assisted by Truffaut, became a sample for describing, defining, and summarizing New Wave Movement.^[5] If we only regard this movement as a certain industry or specific philosophical practice, it is just a nameless incident hidden in a historical march. However, after a few decades, when all the editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma* resigned because they were told (by new

shareholders) that they should be more 'user-friendly' and 'chic'.^[6] From the editorial perspective, we can no longer ignore the meaning structure and spatial turn, the fate of being a cultural movement position. Therefore, *Cahiers du Cinéma* and New Wave Movement are understood by their "space" characteristics. The concept of "space" has absorbed multiple nutrients from the shift of social critical theory of European leftist theorists, the development of natural sciences such as geography and physics, the prosperity of empirical research, and the rebellious will of postmodernism. Besides, the conflict and integration of humanistic tradition and scientific paradigm also play an important role in it. But it is fair to say that the emergence of this concept is directly attributed to the fierce debate between existentialism and structuralism in the mid-20th century by Jean Paul Sartre and Claude Levi Strauss. It was the mutual understanding and compromise between them in the later period that contributed to the birth of space research. The research results are embodied in *The Production of Space* (Henri Lefebvre, 1974), *The Urban Question* (Manuel Castells, 1972), *Social Justice and the City* (David Harvey, 1973), and *Of Other Space* (Michel Foucault, 1976).^[7]

At the same time, *Cahiers du Cinéma* as the position of the New Wave nourishes Godard and many other literary and art figures with existentialist philosophy as their soul. Whether in the dimension of time and space or the context of thinking, these "Handbook School" of directors' moods can be said to be directly related to Sartre's specific ideas. Even some studies think that Godard's film is almost like the "image interpretation" of Sartre's existentialist philosophy.^[8] In addition, Bazin, the first editor-in-chief of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and a thinker of the same period as Sartre, deeply discriminated against and interacted with Sartre's existentialism in his film theory, which was strongly supported by Godard, Truffaut, and others. After more than half a century of the dispute between existentialism and structuralism and the origin of the New Wave Movement, it is still a necessary and transcendental reflection on mediality.

2. Deduction of Intermediary Model: Existential Visualization from Sartre to Godard

In a narrow sense, New Wave movies are generally called "Handbook School" movies or "Author Movies", which refer to movies with "personal style" made by film critics with *Cahiers du Cinéma* as the core. Godard, Truffaut, and Chabrol are often regarded as the Three Musketeers. Works of the latter two only symbolize a free attitude of cynicism and rejecting the old-fashioned, then Godard can be said to be an out-and-out fan of Sartre. "He is the sum of his actions and his life".^[9] In Sartre's early view, the accident and absurdity of the world made "rationality" pale. The lack of logic and clue connection in Godard's works coincides with this argument. Under this philosophy of "free choice", the characters' whim and arbitrary choices and behaviors deconstruct most of the "motivation" or "function" orientation. At the same time, Godard frequently uses "jump cut" and "blank in meaning", which is not only a leap of the director's narrative logic but a free thinking space for the audience. This also embodies Sartre's view of freedom and his statement about "existence precedes essence" and "hell is other people". As Sartre pointed out, "To live, first of all, is to root out from the non-individualized program for its danger of being absent",^[10] which undoubtedly reminds people of Neil Postman's media ecology. However, compared with Postman's "stillness" in his world outlook, Sartre's attitude is even more intense, that is, he is very subjective, clear, and almost hysterical in resisting his metaphorical state of gazing and discipline with things. In Godard's image practice, he also made no secret of his confession through the characters looking directly at the camera, the specialized voice, and the symbolic technique of jump cut. For example, Marianne who left without saying goodbye in *Pierrot the madman*, the flames rolling in an instant, and the vast but dead sea... thus forming some kind of self-faced metaphor and rhetoric, even consciously avoiding the reverse influence of audience consideration.

However, the so-called reviving existentialism has been falsified on the other side of Godard's life course. Godard, who sometimes believed in Marxism, sometimes claimed to be an existentialist, and sometimes was interested in the Cultural Revolution in distant China (for example, his work *La*

Chinoise in 1967)... is surprisingly similar to Sartre transforming his ideas after the war. This also shows that even Sartre, an existentialist, was passively reconstructed by media after being exposed to the specific environment and became the orientation and source of a certain paradigm which is usually understood as a social process.^[11] And Godard, the implementer of this doctrine, can't escape from it, among which his self-contradiction even has some contrasting interests. As Krotz thought: "How a revolution rooted in the mode of communication is related to the meta-process of social construction and cultural reality."^[12] Because we clearly understand existentialism's advocacy of freedom and Godard's personalized bias in inheriting Sartre, the author doesn't intend to make an old defense or refutation for this concept but hopes to prove its transformation from intermediary to media exemplified by Sartre's existentialism theory and Godard's practice.

First of all, this thesis focuses on the mediation at micro and meso levels. Elias once explained figuration as the intermediate variable between individual and society, and the networks of individuals, which is supplemented by structural rules, the integration process of individuals, and actions.^[13] "From the theoretical point of view, the concept of figuration is to overcome the opposition between structure and initiative (or society and individual) in classical sociology."^[14] As far as Godard is concerned, this orientation is more reflected in his self-search which subjectively links to his profound understanding of capitalist political violence, left-wing anarchism tendency, patriarchal ideological consumption, and voyeurism.

When delving into Godard's self-search, the aforementioned figuration spreads out at the same time and becomes the interface of media. From the perspective of field theory, media means the "invasion" of the media field to other social fields, with media power acting on social space in a new form.^[15] The creation of the sound is an example. In Godard's case, sound is regarded as a self-consistent narrative integrated into his film world structure. He not only intricately quoted a large number of sound elements, but considered the loss of sound diversity in the picture;^[16] he skillfully highlighted the possibility of the sound continuum as an independent dimension forming the whole text together with images (such as *Weekend* and *Carmen*);^[17] he directly emphasized the time experience surrounded by sound and gave birth to the corresponding aggregated symbol system for the advancement of narrative (such as *Everyman for Himself* and *Carmen*); he separated sound from human speech acts, and looked down upon the mechanical manipulation of human speech acts by pathetic posture, incompetence of indifferent sound and the economic production system (such as *Six Times Two*, *Everyman for Himself* and so on).^[18] Therefore, in the example of sound as a technique of Godard's text creations, it has formed a spiritual abstraction and social criticism model that is often used for reference in later artistic creation. Just like images we are used to understanding, we can find relevant attitudes and issues from a specific sound.

Therefore, although his existentialist practice has a personal bias, Godard happily set a sample for the expression of self-search and revival, an interpretation of Knoblock's communicative constructivism^[19]. In other words, this is the media of the communication process at the self-level, which is not only equivalent to the meso-level^[20], but also means that Godard has completed the infrastructure-style^[21] meaning construction in the director center and the New Wave movement through his own communication as a medium, and even almost became an intermediary metaphor with two-fold meanings.

3. Adjustment of Spatial Dimension: Media Construction Under the Intervention of "Identity"

In the 1950s, *Cahiers du Cinéma* stepped onto the historical stage with an anti-elitism innovation argument. Although it often has a strong political tendency, its practical route downplays important international changes such as the Cold War, the Cuban Revolution, the Algerian War, McCarthyism, etc. among this group of radical left-wing artists. Meanwhile, it turns more to the political perspective of "identity" with increasing significance. Moreover, out of the enthusiasm for placing on stage, they as directors and authors began to pursue the creation of strong identity worship. Bazin doubted the

"author politics" put forward by young people, he still hoped that the film itself is independent of the author,^[22] which as a strong trend of self-belonging undoubtedly broke through the old vision of film ontology and opened up a unique time and space for the New Wave. This part will discuss the trend, utility, and energy of spatial placing from the aspects of the connection between identity and spatial production, the surge of will in the revolutionary domain, and the transcendence of reengineering media.

The revolutionary nature of "identity" lies first in the essence of its "meta" medium. In fact, after Bazin, Valcroze, and Luo Duca founded the *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1951, the backbone of the film critics at that time such as Astruc, Custer, Jean Domarchi, Luc Moullet, and others came to publish one after another. Although they did show obvious realistic style and efforts in placing on stage, only when the young radicals including Godard, Truffaut, Levitt, Chabrol, and the leader Rohmer (known as Five Pillars of *Cahiers du Cinéma*) arrived could *Cahiers du Cinéma* become a new position with surging revolutionary will. In 1954, Truffaut who was only 21 years old wrote the manifesto *A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema*. When Bazin died in 1958, his young followers had not yet turned into the flag bearers of the times. When Truffaut won the Cannes Award for *The 400 Blows* in 1959, Godard's *Breathless* was born the following year, Chabrol and Levitt started their directing careers with *The Cousins* and *Paris Belongs to Us* respectively, the director as a kind of center can be said to have officially initiated its confrontation with the traditional quality film.^[23] Moreover, rather than challenging the film convention from the skills and tendencies of the text, the authors of the New Wave take "director" as a radical weapon to conquer the elite structure in the traditional capitalist society, which originates authenticity and combativeness for any physical construction in the New Wave. Therefore, Peter Wollen, a British scholar who inherited the "author theory", borrowed Renoir's words: A director only makes "one film" in his life, and a critic's task is to discover it.^[24]

Further, if we only focus on the "identity" of the "director" as the confirmation of self-awareness after the Enlightenment ignoring the attribute of "a socialization process" with the hidden meaning of power interaction and participation, it is impossible to explore any spatial criticism of the New Wave, let alone the so-called meaning kingdom and awakening linked with it.

Taking three axes of subjective construction (power axis, truth axis, and subjective axis) explained in Foucault's Psychiatric Treatment Device into consideration,^[25] there are three corresponding levels of the construction process that can be clarified: first, the path from panopticon to oligopticon to observe the specific presence and invitation of individuals; The second is the picture analysis from the value pedigree. At that time, the differences between the editors of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* and fierce debates among the authors made its comment system become the intersection and testing ground of various philosophical and political issues; The third is the reappearance of law, which is reflected in the return of elitism temperament and the gaze of identity politics. Corresponding to these dimensions, the author divides the surge of revolution in the New Wave into three trends: author scheduling, magazine scheduling, and self-scheduling.

3.1 Author Scheduling

The author's intermediary mode has been explained in the first part from Sartre to Godard. But if the "mediated action" hadn't assembled the "in-process" power for the author and editor in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, they couldn't dispatch the times in any case. The so-called placing on stage is not a new word in the field of directors, referring to "the sum of various elements which can be a spatial relationship, time relationship, body relationship, sound and image relationship, time length, etc. that establish a certain relationship between the world outlook and the audience."^[26] The director who is both powerful and relationship embedding connects with the panopticon mechanism from Bentham to Foucault, which is intended to explain a complicated assembly of power in a mixed space. However, although Foucault's analysis of the space—power framework became the main axis in the second half of the 20th century^[27], it was more than 20 years later that Latour's oligopticon more rigorously described the problems of individual power in spatial scheduling, that is, from the geometric orientation to metaphorical orientation.^[28] Because this discussion of scheduling should not stop at

the surfaced confusion of content visibility but realize the space reshape and flowing power in deformation after individuals are mediated in many ways, such as connection, integration, screening, assembly, etc. Among many identity relationships such as that between directors, directors and the audience, the author has reached some material and concrete "presence" and "invitation".

3.2 Magazine Scheduling

The magazine intermediary here is only a phenomenon overview, not a unique and rigorous academic definition.

There is no doubt that *Cahiers du Cinéma* has innovated aesthetics and directing skills. The construction of a dazzling meaning kingdom is the most magnificent achievement of the New Wave as a social movement. It is inevitably abrupt to mention it in general, but we may find some breakthroughs in the identity of editing. In terms of constituent elements, the editing field is composed of subject elements and object elements of editing activities, and their interaction constitutes the action field of editing practice.^[29] For example, in the summer of 1963, the reformist Levitt as the incumbent editor-in-chief disagreed with Rohmer, the previous editor-in-chief. He advocated judging the film itself according to its realistic environment. Therefore, various social and political issues are brought into the narrative field of the author's "identity". At this stage, the magazine interviewed Roland Barthes and wrote articles on the thoughts of Heidegger and Althusser. Compared with film research, its comment system at that time is more like the rallying point of various philosophical theories and practical observations (which was more typical in the revolutionary stage of *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1970s). Therefore, under the metaphor of kingdom, the intermediary magazine here is more presented in "the third space" and "the city as a medium".^[30] The interpretation of it is carried out around the context of social processes, such as "network" and "production". Nowadays, the Big Bang of Internet technology was far less as common as the infrastructure in that era, and the institutional imagination such as the Internet of Everything seemed not credible at that time. However, as a system and pattern of social media, the network has long been laid along with the "tradition of social construction" and "specific role of media"^[31] represented by Couldry and Hepp. Although "every subfield has its own logic, rules, and conventions",^[32] when they negotiate with each other through a larger and more subtle mediation process, the meaning of the subject converges again and is put into the reproduction of "relationship construction". For example, advocates of the New Wave pursue Bazin's documentary aesthetics, use and publicize depth-of-field lens and long lens in a modest way, radically argue about the essence of author politics, and write an article criticizing *A Man and A Woman* (Lelouch's film in 1966) as a "cunning" imitation... constructing *Cahiers du Cinéma* as a media discourse and its phenomenal nature,^[33] which lets the transcendence of dissent constantly reshape the New Wave as a grand kingdom with harmonious meanings.

3.3 Self-Scheduling

Different from the former two, the intermediary of self lies not only in the creation and production of meaning but also in the flowing space that is disciplined and gazed. Compared with Lefebvre's political and economic orientation of space, Foucault paid more attention to explaining the representational wisdom and operation procedure of power discourse in *Discipline and Punishment*, that is, how power frames and suppresses the subject by the discipline of space and then causes the spread of oppression in reality. This shows that "the environmental rituals" include three concrete forms,^[34] that is, prohibition, discrimination, and authenticity, which not only have external oppressive sexual energy but also lead to the dispelling of internal and self-confirming ontology. Up against the understanding of this "domination", space is connected with different or even diametrically opposite power aspects besides the material media itself, adding changing constraint states and attributes, which means the return of "regularity" in the free generation. This explains why *Cahiers du Cinéma* appearing on the historical stage with the role of anti-elitism seems to have established its new elitism in recent years. In other words, its speech is almost completely non-elitist. But when relying on the serious, profound, and highly subjective discourse space and its production

in history, it inherited a certain elite discourse paradigm, which is beyond the expectation of Michel Frodon who decisively drew a clear line with elitism in the interview as the editor-in-chief of *Cahiers du Cinéma*.^[35] For example, in the speech of many cultural scholars, the Taiwanese directors of the New Wave in China are oddly incarnated as noble intellectuals somehow. At the same time, in the dimension of Foucault's discourse on internal control, the author should also be examined as a "constructed and domesticated spatial meaning provider" for clarifying the essence of power. As the most inescapable political discourse in French film history, "identity" has become a pair of sharp eyes in distance and has completed the seemingly eternal presence of the author's artistic life. Nearly 60 years later, in the Concert Hall of Pleyel, at the Caesar Awards Ceremony of French Film, Roman Polanski who was dissatisfied with the sexual assault scandal won the Best Director Award. We can also feel it when we see Adèle Haenel, the star of *Portrait of A Lady on Fire*, scolding and leaving.

4. Reality Projection and Meaning Exploration: Exemplified by the New Wave in Taiwan

Although history has intercourse, the presented space also has the logic of accommodating time. If the huge production with such detached meanings is only attributed to *Cahiers du Cinéma* rather than the more grand New Wave Movement, we ignore the media metaphor and the above-mentioned discussion. This is not only far from the topic but also undoubtedly damages the argumentation structure, returning to the narrow and materialized spatial cognition of commodity fetishism. Therefore, this part that only echoes the time dimension problem put forward in the text and theme structure will not be overstretched to mislead and confuse readers.

Take Taiwan Province as an example. In the spring of 1984, the Hong Kong Film Festival welcomed the editorial team of *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Olivier Assayas, an incumbent film critic of the magazine at that time, went to Taiwan at the invitation of Chen Guofu and met young directors such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang. Assayas introduced his knowledge of Taiwan films to his colleagues after returning to France, which directly contributed to the appearance of the *Focus on Taiwan* column at the end of 1984 and the debut of Hou Hsiao-Hsien as a director in the world.^[36] In his fixed shooting and long shot, those riversides and football, wind cabinets and Kaohsiung are all lost, floating in the neon of youth. This narrative with the autobiographical meaning of wandering teenagers is just in line with the appetite of the New Wave tradition, "a kind of rough power, the intuition of movies, and the views on some people and places, a kind of sobriety that can keenly understand things".^[37] Similarly, as Peggy Chiao mentioned in her preface to the reprint of the French New Wave, "I was very proud of the films in Taiwan Province of China at that time, with Hou Hsiao-Hsien's realistic cultural history and Edward Yang's modernist urban language. Besides, Stan Lai mixed plot, life, and film. Ang Lee's clean Hollywood narrative bridged a binary discussion of Eastern and Western cultures and father-son relationship." In short, "we (China) finally have a New Wave Movement".^[38]

5. Conclusion

"Media do not reflect reality, but take us away from reality, which takes something real such as a person or an event and changes its form to produce the text we finally get."^[39] Under the turn of material ontology research, space production, as a transcendental perspective, finally showcases the media generation process of "man" and then clarifies the surroundings and society constructed by this "generation".

That's why only after understanding the essence of *Cahiers du Cinéma* as a media power and space construction can we examine that the New Wave is not only a glimpse in the long history, but an eternal kindling extended and connected with the "meaning" interpretation of many social revolutions and movements from the perspective of communication.

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