

Metaphorical Cinema

The most intriguing feature of the Chinese language, in my opinion, is the non-phonetic nature of 汉字 (Chinese characters). That is, one may know what a Chinese character means but may not know how to pronounce it. Let me use myself as an example. When I am reading a text that is written in English or Korean, I, naturally, read/say out loud all the words in my head even if I do not know the meaning of each and every word that is being spoken to my mind. However, when I am reading a text that is written in Chinese I find myself not reading the words to myself in my head but rather just know. Of course my lack of knowledge in Chinese language only allows me to read simple everyday characters, but nonetheless that is what happens. In other words, Chinese language is a phenomenon that occurs through ideal images (i.e. pictorial) rather than a signification that comes through cognition. Phonetic languages naturally guide its users to cognize the significations of the words through sound whereas pictorial languages naturally allow its users to associate the pictures with what they already knew.

The films that I prefer to watch and prefer to make are those of pictorial nature. That is, each image in a film does not guide us to cognize the film but rather allows us to naturally associate the images with the phenomena life, just like the Tang Dynasty poems that beautifully execute the metaphorical simplicity to allow the readers to associate the Chinese language with the phenomena of life rather than many Western poems, say Romantic poems, that tell something about life for the readers to think about life. Note that the most naïve poems rely on personal pronouns that symbolize the poet and the people of his/her past as dramatic signifiers, but matures poets can turn them into the metaphors of life.

Metaphorical cinema consists of metaphorical pictures that do not rely on the structure of logic but rather manifest those that are already known and felt. A metaphorical film is a dream. A metaphorical film needs not to be analyzed, as analyzing a dream is a fickle preconception. One should not analyze one's dream but rather just believe it and accept it. Because metaphorical films exhibit those that are already known and felt, they are truthful and honest whereas symbolic films are expository and overly subtextual. Subtext renders the directors, actors and cinematographers to become psychoanalysts – nonbelievers of dreams.

Symbolic films (e.g. films that rely on subtextual dramaturgy, like most industrial films and films made by young filmmakers who were taught by the industry on “how to make films”) can be taken apart and be analyzed bit by bit, which is kind of fun to do. On the other hand, it is absurd to analyze metaphorical films, for they already contain within themselves everything that there is to be understood. They are, as Kant said it, the thing-in-itself. It is a common mistake to try to understand a metaphorical film because there is nothing to be said. Everything is already there within the honest and truthful compositions. It should not surprise the audience that the visuals of metaphorical films are clearly superior to those of structural films. Unfortunately, because there is nothing to be said about metaphorical films, people end up branding them as “art films”. “Art film” in actuality does not actually exist – there are only films that are art and films that are just films. The films that are not structural but yet are loaded with significations are the worst of all, they are so-called postmodern cinema. Avoid that.

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