The Transition of Film Noir into a Genre of Crime Cinema

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Abstract: Some have underrated Film Noir due to some misconception that it is solely limited to black-and-white imagery. However, it encompasses much more than that. It supports an aesthetic and serves as a foundational pillar for crime cinema. This paper will use formal techniques such as diegesis, montage, mise-en-scène, camera angle, and camera movement to analyze two scenes from crime cinema. One example is *The Naked City*, a quintessential Film Noir that employs chiaroscuro lighting to accentuate the criminal narrative. Another illustrative instance is *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three*. The argument surrounding Film Noir and crime cinema reveals different depictions of geographical space, yet they share similarities in their representations of themes, including war trauma, masculinity, and class. *The Naked City* employs a straightforward approach to represent its unique landscape, effectively connecting external and internal spaces. *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* uses transportation and currency symbols to establish distinct space connections. Both films, produced in the post-war era, allow for allegorical exploration of auteurs' imagination and re-imagination through cinematic elements. These elements ambiguously craft narratives that intricately blend aesthetics and ideology. In this case, the transition of Film Noir into the realm of crime cinema influences the development of modern cinema.

Keywords: Film Noir, crime cinema, landscape, aesthetic, ideology

1. Introduction

German Expressionism, Italian Neo-realism, and French New Wave initially influenced New York Film Noir. It is plausible to assume that New York Film Noir represents a fusion of multicultural expressionism. The era had passed when Film Noir was the only form representing city space, mood, tone, style, and genre [1]. Today, however, classical crime cinemas offer an alternative to the unpredictable narrative of the anti-urban space in New York City. In 1979, Jackson claimed that before representing the geographical space, the auteurs often prioritize analyzing and resolving on-screen issues before delving into geographical representation. In other words, the primary focus is on the protagonists' diegesis [2]. In this manner, the significance of landscape formation and interpretation within Film Noir has waned.

In contrast, from the author's perspective, the meaning of Film Noir, especially its depiction of landscape expression, remains irreplaceable and lays the foundation of crime cinema. This article undertakes a compared analysis of two films shot in New York City, including the differences in space representation and similar allegories in *The Naked City*, directed by Jules Dassin in 1948, and

The Taking of Pelham One Two Three, directed by Joseph Sargent in 1974. A pertinent scene-based comparison is conducted using formal analysis techniques encompassing diegesis, montage, mise-en-scène, camera angle, and camera movement. The principal argument delved into the distinctive logic of diegesis and the historical context in shaping landscape-driven cinematic narrative [2]. Equally paramount are allegorical themes of war trauma, masculinity, and class, which forge undeniable parallels.

2. Landscape

2.1. *The Naked City*

2.1.1. The Distance Between the Landscape and the Protagonists

The expression of landscape in *The Naked City* is examined. Formal techniques are employed to analyze distance and establish a connection between external and internal spaces, reflecting the evolving representation of American culture in Film Noir amidst rapid geographical change. *The Naked City* shows how living space is conceived and perceived in a multicultural society. In other words, it extends its exploration from the physical New York City to its symbolic representations. The connection is created through architecture, urban space, photography, and mass media [1].

An illustrative example is the analysis of the clips from 60:26-60:32 in *The Naked City* [3]. The cinematography employs an established shot to emphasize the visually spectacular and communal context juxtaposing fancy New York stores over time [2]. In addition, as Gabriel argues, wide-angle shots can highlight the socio-cultural disparities between groups [4]. According to Don Mitchell, landscapes, such as middle-class labor, reinforce the specific social identity. The parallel editing of a dolly shot maintains coherence in the characters' movement, ensuring cinematic realism and bridging the ontological gap between the "real" and the "reel" [2]. In other words, reality and cinematic world. The shot produces the distance between the protagonists and their landscape. Particularly evident through the juxtaposition of the New York crowd and architectural elements. The rhythmic montage, involving a jump cut from a medium shot to a close-up, enhances the coherence of the criminal's expression. Close-up views are always about emotion and effectively de-emphasizes location interpretation and tone [4]. The synchronization of this montage with the sound of a gunshot creates a seamless link between scenes, as advocated by Jean-Pierre Mocky, who emphasizes the productivity of initially silent filming followed by the construction of soundtracks [5]. Therefore, the interplay of the established shot, wide angle shot, dolly shot, parallel editing, rhymic montage, and synchronized sound contributes to the cohesiveness of the Film Noir.

2.1.2. The Distance Between the Landscape and the Audiences

Moreover, audiences' engagement is reinforced through manipulating perspective, employing low and high cinema angles to create a "god-trick" effect. These angles heighten the spatial disparities between subjects [4]. In the analyzed clip, the framing mainly utilizes the observer's perspective, encompassing tracking shots of characters from behind and in front and aerial shots. It means that the audience becomes invisible within the diegesis of the frame, enabling an omnipresence within the film's space while maintaining physical separation [2]. From the audience's viewpoint, the cinematic space is characterized by a continuous crossing of the line between the conceivable and inconceivable. For instance, depictions of street life and city view are presented to audiences with a mirroring effect. In other words, it implies that Dassin's imaginative realm transgresses and challenges spatial boundaries, engendering a sense of space within and beyond the film. Landscape aesthetics are of the utmost importance in bridging the connection between the cinematic screen and the real world, with the depicted area continually expanding as criminal explorations unfold [6].

The interplay of cinematography and montage connects New York City's space, criminal events, and the audience's vision, thereby presenting the city's intricate spatial complexity, diversity, and social vitality through meticulous mise-en-scene [7].

2.1.3. The External Landscape

Focusing on the relationship between cinema and the city reflects the dynamic of external and internal spaces within contemporary urban societies. In the realm of external space, New York explicitly exemplifies the city of ambition' and represents the desire that infuses energy and purpose. The skyscraper is a symbolic element of the environment and encompasses a broader cultural significance. These towering structures continuously and partially shape the history of the city and its ordinary inhabitants through their distinct lines and silhouettes. As Donald Appleyard suggests, an environment becomes a social symbol when it is intentionally regarded as a representative of an individual or a group significantly influencing various functions. The strategic placement of skyscrapers conveys the message of authority and prestige, including cultural legitimacy, social status, and economic power symbols [8]. The skyscrapers function as conduits of communication to the urban populace, embodying the essence of modernity and serving as distinct markers of the city's downtown and neighborhood.

A traditional dichotomy surfaces in their relationship, often juxtaposing the "base," encompassing facets such as society, wealth, destitution, work, class, race, income, and housing with the superstructure, including culture, text, image, and sign [9]. Translating the lived environment into film amalgamates the pragmatic strength of utilitarianism with a compassionate human perspective. Its narrative focuses on everyday life, neighborhoods, streets, and families. The aesthetic of separation between institutional city life and common humanity represents the romanticism of modernity. The city offers its residents both the romance of ambitious skyscraper ambition and the embrace of intimate neighborhood life.

The role of Film Noir in developing nations, especially evident in the fortune of New York City, encapsulates the American archetype, embracing the concept of Americanization and globalization. The film medium shapes lived urban space as a cultural practice and reflects civilization through its intricate production, distribution, and exhibition levels. The future, as depicted, presents a dynamic cityscape dominated by skyscrapers, which expresses modern thought through its architecture, nature, life, and spirit.

2.1.4. The Internal Landscape

For the internal realm, depicting a divided and multifaceted cityscape is not exclusive to New York. The 1930s, marked by the Great Depression, intensified auteurs' interest in human experience and social issues. The city became an additional film participant in the cinematic narrative as European-trained immigrant filmmakers influenced American production during the 1930s and 1940s. Based on these factors, urban settings were used to create and accentuate feelings of tension and isolation. In other words, the essence of tense and somber cities becomes a defining part of Film Noir. Notably, Chiaroscuro lighting was frequently used in an overtly allegorical-joyful manner in sunlight, symbolizing respite from malevolence and darkness [10]. For the past fifty years, American communities have been associated with ambiguous tension, a phenomenon driven by the prevalent anti-urban bias in American culture and the existential conditions of the immediate postwar world. As Edward Soja has described, 'relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the ostensibly innocent spatiality of social life," and "human geographies become populated with ethnicity and ideologies" [11]. In other words, the "social of the spectacle" through cinema reflects public space and individuality - the condition of contemporary metropolitan life. Criminality and

homelessness significantly influenced the city's symbolic representation transference, encompassing its towering structures, kinetic energy, and emotive force. Globalization can occasionally be advantageous as a homeopathic cure for modernization and economic homogenization by subverting the norms of classical films [12]. In other words, the internal problem can be exposed and solved through the scenes and sequences presented in cinema.

2.2. *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three*

2.2.1. Scene Analysis

The clip analysis spans from 44:19 to 53:46 in *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* [13]. The over-tonal montage builds the spaces' coherence among spaces depicted in the clips, even as the events unfold concurrently in different locations. This concept, as referred to by Harvey, encapsulated "time-space compression" [14]. As Kracauer said, "When history is made in the streets, the street tends to move onto the screen" [11]. For example, the internal spaces like the underground tunnel, subway, command center, mayor's bedroom and bank are juxtaposed with external spaces like the main street through parallel editing. The symbolic significance of elements such as wires, subways, highways, and money intensifies, serving as ethereal conduits that visually and thematically bridge the gap between exterior and interior realms, balancing order and chaos [14].

Regarding the opening scene, a master shot and deep focus create the psychological distance between the victims and perpetrators through the landscape. A pan shot, complemented by a police officer's voice-over, guides the audience's gaze into the tunnel. This significant police officer serves the dual role of monitoring, hijacking, and anticipating imminent tensions threatening the environment. Compared with the synchronized soundtrack of *The Naked City*, the acousmatic sound from the telephone builds continuity as scenes seamlessly evolve into sequences [15]. The actual location is captured through non-ornamental mise-en-scene and camera positioning. The scene is bathed in a soft illumination dominated by an orange and brown color scheme [16]. All these shots constitute the norm of cinema diegesis [17].

2.2.2. The External and Internal Landscape

Sargent incorporates the notion of landscape as a means of critique, aiming to raise awareness and provide representations of society with contemporary relevance on the one hand. In other words, this approach does not confine itself to mere political compliance or resistance but instead delves into developing communications, media, and transportation networks from city to city and region to region. In other words, the destruction wrought by the hijackers establishes a link with internal space. This exploration delves into the web of New York's social, political, and economic inequalities while also probing the physical and psychic encroachment of the urban landscape through rapid changes in daily life.

On the other hand, it combined overt and covert facets of urbanization where those hijackers are imbued with a distinctive moral urgency and social purpose. For example, Mr. Blue's remark, "better than sale life insurance," embodies an exploration of hunger, poverty, displacement, and unemployment. Whitehead's narrative unearths the untold stories, delving into "the denied, the repressed, and the forgotten," thus navigating the realm of self-narration and self-representation within the backdrop of war trauma [18]. This narrative tapestry unfolds against the background of post-war reconstruction, individualization, and secularization [11]. Logically, the interplay between internal and external spaces oscillates between practice and circumstance, embodying both the overt and the covert ways of city modernization and urbanization.

2.2.3. The Symbolic Representation

At the core of this narrative stands the symbol of transmission, epitomizing the zenith of capitalism, including the symbolism of currency and weapons. This symbolism links seated victims, standing hijackers, and the moving police. The subway alters the relationship between spatial perception, bodily motion, and transit architecture. Acting on both an individual and communal level, it waves time through dialogue and space through its movement, providing an unconscious framework for explaining the society's coherence, stability, and territoriality [19]. In a nutshell, it liberates the full visual potential of cinema for all of society [7]. The city is the most apparent manifestation of modernization, exemplified by reconstruction after the conflict, individualization, and secularization. The process of formal rejuvenation preceded the cultural reorganization, providing meaning for national and individual self-examination.

Moreover, it is deeply embedded in a people's narrative and cultural identity - the dialectic between war and peace, civilization and barbarism, reaction, and progress [9]. Compared with *The Naked City*, the former emphasizes the link between the New York landscape and the criminal event. Sargent's focus within *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* rests upon the physical, psychological space connections. Criminal activity is formed in private rather than public spaces. For example, the hijackers navigate the urban environment by occupying the subway. The interplay, with facets linked to race, class, gender, and ethnicity, introduces complexity to the urban culture. As exemplified by the money counting scene, a handheld tracking shot and a close-up shot portray the amount of the money, simultaneously emphasizing the presence of people experiencing poverty. Like other criminals, they must adjust to the city, including earning money, finding employment, and finding social support. Instead of isolation, invisibility, and internalization, this narrative transforms a multiplicity of human experiences into a "disciplinary" society [20]. Through all mise-en-scene and montage, the scene simultaneously achieves a dual feat: evoking a sense of realism and complexity while offering a reflective commentary on the broader issues within the natural world [21].

3. Allegory

3.1. War Trauma

Last but not least, it is crucial to introduce the concept of "cognitive mapping" to illustrate the structural and historical relationship between war trauma, masculinity, and economic formations [22]. The repercussion of events such as the Great Depression, World War II, and the Vietnam War reverberated through cities like New York, leading to a deterioration of infrastructure. These grim and gloomy urban narratives were later labelled "Film Noir". It reflects American society's response to urban formlessness, striving to craft a cohesive portrayal of the city's environment over time. Unlike subsequent crime films, the ambience in Film Noir is characterized by moral and ethical ambiguity, including hopelessness, isolation, tension, and anxiety. This emotional ambivalence is tied to urban form modernity nostalgia-a complex sentiment toward the ever-shifting cityscape.

Consequently, the chiaroscuro light of Film Noir elucidates the struggles of both victims and criminals [10]. The criminals and hijackers in both films express their anxieties and try to escape from New York. While John Orr hypothesizes that "the world can be redeemed from evil," this optimism is tempered by other social and historical occurrences [23]. The pattern of denying responsibility, as opposed to present confessions of guilt, was the dominant cultural response to the Vietnam War, according to Keith Beattie [17].

In the case of *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three*, the design of the hijacker's characters' is based on soldiers in the Vietnam War. It has been widely acknowledged that the Vietnam War was unprecedented for the United States in at least two key aspects. First, Vietnam was distinct from traditional conflicts, characterized by its guerrilla warfare tactic, and this implies a war not fought on conventional battlefields but one where the enemy was elusive, adaptable, and often omnipresent. Second, the scope and intensity of guerrilla activity blurred the distinction between civilians and non-combatants. These aspects of the Vietnam War significantly affected American service members' experiences. Transcripts reveal their concerns regarding identity, security, and support. The character of Mr. Blue, who does not serve in the military, embodies a pervasive sense of insecurity closely related to the ambiguous identity. In other words, the trauma endured by victims may propagate to others. For instance, these perpetrators symbolically transplant the conflict to New York [24].

3.2. Masculinity

In addition, the dynamics of masculinity have been influenced by shifts in wartime and postwar societal norms. Many returning service members faced disabilities, trauma, unemployment, alienation, and divorce. According to Sartell, the genre of white male paranoia films presented the white male's resentment and rage in response to a conceived loss of privilege. Despite being regarded as oppressors by society, the typical white American males are depicted as victims, [17]. Both auteurs transformed external innocence into cinematic guilt and external oppression into criminality on film crime. According to Mani King Sharpe, cinema can transfer a collective ideology to re-write and reconsider history, reshaping and revaluing history to offer solace and ethnic reassurance [17].

3.3. Class

The concept of "livability" undergoes a transition from the harmonious image of the city to the seedy underbelly of its street and interiors, An allegory of the crime cinema in geography studies [1]. This shift mirrors the transition from public spaces to economic insecurity, where economic insecurities purpose in which economics and morality intertwine to recreate the public sphere [14]. As Rich Ravitch said, "The public views noise and chaos as a form of in the subways, and this perspective link location with dirt and immoral conduct due to their audacious persistence in infiltrating places deemed pure, spotless, and sterile" [6]. It means the location links dirt and immoral behaviour due to its persistence and temerity in appearing in places considered spotless, pure, and sterile. Furthermore, "chaos" is at the bottom of the hierarchy, which is meant to signify a problem that goes much deeper than its superficial expression and is viewed as a permanent corruption of meanings such as community, order, and transportation [25]. In other words, the relationship between the deviant impoverished and the upstanding bourgeoisie is rooted in long-standing ideological and cultural concerns.

In contrast, "the annihilation of space" is not only the collapse of space but also the annihilation of its residents. Both concepts reflect and reinforce a highly exclusive sense of modern citizenship, a recognition that extends the rights of citizenship to the wealthy alone, thereby excluding the impoverished both from their rights and their capacity for autonomous thought and action by creating the rights of the wealthy, which are believed sufficient for everyone else [14]. In other words, they have responded to globalization and other secular economic changes by simply eradicating the spaces of poverty. Neil Smith's observations in 1996 depict the bourgeoisie's "vengefulness" toward the impoverished as the "script for the urban future" [26]. In other words, insecurity in an unstable global market and the capitalist agenda contribute to the criminalization of

people experiencing homelessness. This dynamic is evident in *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three*, especially when the mayor objectifies the victim's value for vote support. The ironic impartiality of this approach renders the impoverished prone to becoming hijackers or criminals [14].

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the film clips examined in this article strongly correlate with the representation of the New York landscape, the arrangement of mise en scène, montage, soundtrack design, and ambiguous allegoric implication. This combined design element contributes to each film's distinct visual impression and narrative. Film Noir emerges as a cinematic form that skillfully intertwines the depiction of landscapes with the crime genre, offering a unique portrayal on the screen during its era.

In specific details, *The Naked City* exemplified the Film Noir style, utilizing chiaroscuro light and deep focus to represent both external and internal spaces. In contrast, *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* presents a nuanced self-development narrative, underscored by the acousmatic telephone symbol. While variations in mise en scène and montage techniques depict the landscape, the underlying allegorical similarities cannot be ignored, particularly in terms of war trauma, masculinity, and class. As such, the analysis presented in this article stands for a comprehensive and suitable exploration of the subject matter.

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