



Enhanced Lens — A Visual Style Analysis of Douglas Sirk's Family Melodrama

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Abstract: By rewriting and rebuilding the Hollywood family melodrama, Douglas Sirk established the “Sirk style” which is enough to obtain the qualification of the author of electric energy, and influenced the creation of the family melodrama later. During the period of Universal Company, Sirk used exquisite and excessive film style to constantly break through the conservative ideological bottom line displayed in the mediocre script with no taste. The director of Brecht's avant-garde plays in Germany had the ability to turn the decadent into the miraculous and inject a distinctly personal soul into these banal stories. This article will explore the visual breakthrough of “Sirk style” from three perspectives: scene prop design, scene scheduling, lighting and color.

Keywords: Douglas Sirk, melodrama, technicolor, Hollywood, golden age

1. Introduction

In the '50s, “serious” film critics attacked Sirk's films as “hypocritical, expensive, overly full technicolor” and the narrative's confusion of delusion and reality. Summing up the main points of criticism of Sirk was a grievance that the form was overly exaggerated, empty, and vulgar; They feel sad and angry at the vanity of his “literature wins and quality is history”, and hope that Sirk can become a gentleman of “gentle and courteous”. These criticisms and Sirk's creative ideas lead to the misplacement and misreading of *The Times*.

However, Sirk's work proves that there can be time-tested works in the industry of one-off consumption. By rewriting and reconstructing the Hollywood family melodrama, Douglas Sirk created the “Sirk style” that qualified him as a film writer and influenced the creation of later family melodramas. Sirk knew well the allure of cinema, the tantalising appeal of “viewing”, a state of rapt attention akin to the concept of “staring”. The gaze presupposes the existence of a substantial rather than an empty value worth staring at, a temporal process through which the consciousness grasps, examines and explores an object. For those dull and sleepy movies, Sirk makes the scene scheduling function of ideological criticism through the overload of information transmission inside the picture. As a result, some of the secret answers in Sirk's films lie in excessive imagery rather than in the kitsch narrative. [1]

2. Overload of Visual Load

A Hollywood career producer, Ross Hunter has worked with Sirk on family melodramas and has worked as a producer in a variety of genres, including comedies, musicals, thrillers, and action films. He has contributed to the commercial film market with keen market insight and judgment. Despite being a man, Ross Hunter has a clear rule for the creation of family melodrama: “Find a good story and embellish it. The audience expects to see beautifully designed Settings and decent costumes on screen.” The phrase was inspired by the lavish MGM musicals of the 1930s, where the opulent Settings, dazzling stage machinery and costumes of female stars combined to create a fantasy world. Through “good taste,” Ross Hunter hopes to increase the audience appeal of family melodramas and turn the Hollywood genre into a dream factory in which audiences are immersed in artificially created fantasy worlds.

Clearly, this is not the effect Sirk is aiming for. However, as one of many contracted directors with no voice at the studio, Sirk's options were limited. Rather than opt out of the system and become an independent director, Sirk chose to stay in and game the system. Later “Movie kids” also revolutionized the Hollywood genre within the system. For Sirk, over-decorated middle-class homes, especially living rooms, not only squeezed the space of the protagonists, but also increased the visual burden on the audience while watching the movie, creating a sense of oppression. [2] In family melodramas, space deconstructs time and narrative time is greatly compressed, while the emotions of the characters are expressed through excessive scene scheduling, engaging in intense emotional struggles within the constrictions of suffocating domestic claustrophobic and social Spaces, accompanied by devastating masochistic/self-defeating acts.

The widowed heroine, Jiali, lives in luxury in a two-storey villa with elaborate and elaborate interiors that exceed even the affluence of a middle-class home in *Locked Spring*. In Garley's appearance, she prepares lavish lunches and interesting flowers. Had it not been for RON, it would have been another lonely lunch for Gary. In Sirk's images of middle-class homes, the protagonists often drown in overdecorated objects, becoming yet another elaborate prop in the space of middle-class homes.

3. Restrained Distance

In highly emotional genres such as romantic films, romantic comedies, and chick flicks, the camera often uses indulgent timing at the emotional climax of the protagonist, amplifying his emotions by getting close to him. Griffith creatively transformed the "close-up space" relationship into a "close-up emotion" relationship. However, this technique became stale over time and became a hackneyed device of emotional agitation. Sirk, influenced by Brecht's plays, was highly concerned with the excessive decoration of middle-class homes and the overall atmosphere of *Spaces*, leading him to show considerable restraint in camera scheduling.

As a result, high-emotion scenes in Sirk's family melodramas make more use of long and medium shots to establish the connection between the characters' emotions and the repressed space, and rarely use close-ups to show full action in the narrative space. [3] This concept is particularly evident in *Love with a Bitter Rain* and *Spring Breeze and Autumn Rain*, where Sirk uses exquisite vistas and panoramic compositions to fully show the relationship between two and three people, while maintaining visual distance between the audience and the characters, and trying to avoid the audience's psychological identification from sharing the same perspective as the protagonist. In addition, Sirk uses the wide screen and deep focal length to show the intimacy between the protagonists, and the physical distance between the two shows the estrangement of each other's spiritual world. In *The film*, Sirk consciously shot close-ups and close-ups of Garry and RON (as well as female close friends), so that the conventional close-ups and close-ups gain emotional function in this context, that is, the intimate relationship between lovers and friends, while between men, it is more visual.

In "The Rain", Mickey rides in Marelli's two-row red convertible, and Marelli is isolated. Leigh flirts with Mickey's language and flirts with his eyes, but he pretends to be unromantic. Sirk films their dialogue in front of her. In widescreen proportions, Sirk places Mickey and Mairelli at opposite ends of the screen, creating a space between them that takes up nearly one-third of the length of the screen in the narrow body of the car

4. Highly artificial and emotional presentation of the screen space

Film props and scenery not only carry the narrative space environment, but also integrate into the narrative and affect the audience's understanding of the plot. In order to make the film's sense of form more prominent, Sirk has created a set of clichés that can be called a "montage of vulgar rationality" visual codes. It is a system of symbols capable of drawing on the viewer's graphic associations: the mill, deer and Christmas tree for nature, the mink coat for success, the oil rig for capitalism, the flaming karaoke bar for decadence, red clothes and speeding cars for irresponsibility and excess, and so on. In this way, Sirk creates a sense of distance between the text of the film and the logic of reality.

At the same time, Sirk's use of gauntlet colors and emotional lighting on props and sets imbues the picture with a highly subjective German expressionist and symbolic style. In this sense, the use of family melodrama sets and lighting is in line with the excesses of universal horror films of the 1930s.

In the film, Dorothy Malone, who is in love, drives the red convertible car around the city, accosting the various men in the city, and becoming a well-known "slut". Although this car is luxurious, it is not very special, but Dorothy Malone's coziness makes this car a unique "desire car, it seems that her sexual desire has deeply infiltrated the red car body.

The unreality (surrealism) of Sirk's film is also reflected in the mood of the changing color and light, and this extremely stylized treatment is not unique. In Tony Scott's *A Storm in Red Tide* (1995), the cool color of dawn on the sea turns to the peaceful golden of dusk as the nuclear threat is lifted, and in Johnnie To's *Exile* (2006), No one can miss the "magic door" that turns red and green at the beginning of the film.

At the end of the film, it is a dark night in the snow season, just like the night scenes in the silent film era are all dyed blue, and the street scene is soaked in a melancholy deep blue. Gary is alone in the living room, where the fireplace is glowing red and the whole room is bathed in warm orange, while Gary is enveloped in the melancholy blue outside, when his friend Alida brings the news that RON Kirby has been injured in an accident.

The iconoclastic sets, colors, and lighting transform the "ineffable" inner emotions into unconscious resonance, and the "dull shoestring of the family melodrama into the stuff of dreams and desires." At this point, the significance of watching family melodramas for the implied scheduling of scenes has gone beyond the audio-visual pleasure brought by mere star-

ing, and in a secret way immune to film censorship, it reaches a consensus with the sophisticated audience, making up for the lack of passion in conservative Hollywood under the constraints of The Times.

With his unique visual style, Douglas Sirk presents a highly artificial and emotional screen world, inheriting the defamiliarizing effect of Brecht's plays, always reminding the audience to keep a distance from the screen, obtain an independent reflective and critical attitude, and stimulate the audience's degree of social intervention.

By consciously exposing the artificiality and falseness of narrative and image, the film is de-normalized and de-stereotypical. In the history of film, this technique of disconnection is more reflected in avant-garde films and anti-film creations with small audiences, such as Jean-Luc Godard's visual strategy of quick editing, skip cutting, out-of-picture talking to the audience in the auditory strategy of mismatched shots, and non-narrative intersections in the narrative strategy. However, this method is really applied to the expression of mainstream commercial films. It takes a lot more courage and wisdom.

5. Conclusions

The core style of Sirk's family melodrama is to criticize the content in an excessive form, giving serious themes involving social reality a form that the audience can perceive and accept. Through the in-depth analysis of Douglas Sirk's unique visual style in Hollywood family melodramas, we can get a glimpse of his far-reaching influence in film creation. By exploring these three aspects from overloaded visual load and restrained distance to highly artificial and emotional presentation of screen space, Sirk successfully breaks the shackles of traditional expressions and injects new vitality and depth into the art of cinema.

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