

## 7 Film Space as Theatrical Performing Space

### A Multimodal Discourse Approach to Transmedial Analysis

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#### 1 Introduction

An intensely debated issue within film studies is the comprehension of narrative space. Studies on this issue have taken different but interrelated perspectives to examine viewers' navigation through levels of space in film. Bordwell and Thompson (2013: 84), for instance, distinguish three organizing principles of space: plot space, story space, and screen space. Plot space refers to settings in *mise-en-scène*; story space can include spaces created in the viewers' imagination associated with the plot space. That is, apart from settings, story space can encompass narratively significant spaces that are never shown in a film but only imagined by its viewers. The third type of space is on-/off-screen space, often akin to camera manipulation of framing. Most empirical analyses of space in film form, style, and aesthetics are anchored in these three main types of spatial description (cf. Bordwell and Thompson 1976; Rodriguez 1998; Saxton 2007). In discussions at a more abstract level, Jones (2015a) proposes approaching space in Hollywood action films from the perspective of cultural theories. Cutting, Iricinschi, and Brunick (2013) develop a method for portraying character associations in an abstract sequence of two-dimensional maps and for structuring narrative dynamics of an entire film in a conceptual space.

Building on the multifaceted accounts of narrative space in film, this chapter will argue for a multilevel framework for synthesizing the different conceptual perspectives of film space that distinguishes different degrees of meaning abstraction. Multileveled analysis is not new in media studies: for instance, the framework of film character analysis proposed by Eder (2010) has elucidated the need to distinguish levels such as characters as artifacts, fictional beings, symbols, and symptoms. Grodal (2009: 16) also argues for a hierarchical model for film emotions, distinguishing fundamental, universal brain-body features at the bottom level and historical and aesthetic developments of film elements at higher levels. These studies all show how inquiries into the complex narrative comprehension process can substantially benefit from a fine-grained, multileveled analysis. As this chapter will show, distinguishing different strata of spatial meaning in film reveals the subtle theatrical analogy embedded in filmic media at different levels of analysis.

In the period 1908 to 1917, as film became a popular medium, filmmakers utilized spatial choreography in a manner similar to that used for the theater stage to construct space (Bordwell 1981). Since the films were silent, one major way to tell stories visually was to set the camera far away from the action and setting, and the actors played out the drama in long shots. With little cutting, many shots from this beginning period look like theatrical productions (cf. Bordwell 1997). This style is re-used throughout film history by master film directors such as Hou Hisao-Hsien and Ozu (Bordwell 2005). At another level of comparison, films such as *ANNA KARENINA* (2012), *DOGVILLE* (2003), and some parts of *SYNECDOCHE NEW YORK* (2008) employ theatrical layouts and transform the setting into a performing stage. These films, however, use entirely different shot designs from the staging-based shot approach—for instance, here the narrative space is curved out through cutting. That is, an establishing shot somewhat like a stage framing is broken down into close-ups taken from different camera positions and film tension is built up by close shots. Another type of theatrical design in film space draws on *spatial confinement*. For example, in films such as *DIAL M FOR MURDER* (1954), Haneke's *AMOUR* (2012), and Hitchcock's *ROPE* (1948) plot space is substantially confined within one apartment. The space within these films seems like the epitome of photographed theater. Viewers are given brief views of spatial relations of the rooms within the apartments and nearly all actions of the characters unfold in the restricted space. Other events and past actions taking place outside the apartment are implied and verbally described by the characters. This theatrical aspect of confined film space is particularly elaborated by Bazin in his essay *Theatre and Cinema* (1967: 76), when he celebrates the theatrical value and conventions applied in filmmaking.

Drawing on the different comparative dimensions of cinematic space and theatrical design, this chapter will propose a multimodal framework of film spatial analysis and will above all unravel how the framework can effectively address empirical questions such as the mutual relationship in theater and film: namely, in what way, that is with what kinds of strategies and resources, are film and theatrical performing space most relevantly represented.

Most importantly, the framework put forward in this chapter will bridge an analytical gap that was problematized four decades ago. In the 1970s, the distinguished film theorist Brian Henderson (1971) discussed the two dominant types of film theory, the montage-based Eisensteinian theory and the realist Bazinian theory. One of his arguments was that the two contrasting theories are, in general, incomplete theories of the sequence. Neither theory considers the relation of the part (the sequence) to the whole. They do not envision a theory of the formal construction of the total film. Moreover, in another essay, Henderson (1980) points out the problem that:

both Eisenstein montage theory and Bazinian long take theory . . . both preferring the either/or mentality that each sees as necessary to its own

survival. . . Stylistic combinations of long take and cutting techniques fall exactly between the two schools, in that they combine elements of the favoured style of each; but they are treated as falling outside of each because each prefers not to recognize them. . . . This limitation is compounded in importance by the expressive impact that editing has upon the long take sequence.

(Henderson 1980: 53–54)

Through applying the discourse approach to an extensive analysis of the entire film of Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *THE ASSASSIN* (2015), the chapter will show how the discourse approach can be applied to effectively and systematically examine sequences throughout a film. Moreover, subtle blends of the devices under the two dominant trends can also be highlighted to elucidate the expressive cinematic tools used upon the theater-oriented long take sequence.

Furthermore, the framework proposed in this chapter also contributes to performance studies with regard to the emerging issues such as how to analytically distinguish live performance and mediated performance (cf. Scheer and Klich 2011: 96). I contend that one dimension of these issues can be approached by applying a multimodal framework to film and performing space, as this framework has the potential of revealing spatial distinction of theatrical staging and filmed performance using cinematic editing devices.

The chapter is structured as follows: First, the next section reviews the historical context of cross-media comparison between film and theater. This will then be followed by an elucidation of a multimodal approach. In particular, I will first exemplify why it is theoretically significant to distinguish the strata of materiality and discourse in cross-media comparison and then propose a framework for analyzing film space at the level of discourse analysis. This framework will then be applied to conducting a spatial analysis of *THE ASSASSIN* (2015). As the analysis of the entire film will not only show that, without using any theatrical decorations, Hou is one of the most innovative filmmakers to date to apply different spatial styles of theatricality; but also, the framework will provide systematic, fine-grained analyses of transmedial patterns throughout a film. Finally, the chapter will give some thought to how the discourse framework contributes to complementing and supporting problem-solving approaches to film space (cf. Bordwell 2005).

## 2 Transmediality of Film and Theater

For some time, all useful ideas in art have been extremely sophisticated . . . a painting can be “literary” or sculptural, a poem can be prose, theatre can emulate and incorporate cinema, cinema can be theatrical. We need a new idea. It will probably be a very simple one. Will we be able to recognize it?

(Sontag 1966: 37)

In the last century, the theoretical value of ‘media specificity’ and ‘trans-medial comparison’ was often at the center of critical debates, particularly in the realm of film and art theories. According to the film theorist Noel Carroll (1996), numerous film and art theorists between 1930 and 1970 argued for the dogma of media specificity, referring to a form of ‘medium essentialism’: “This is the doctrine that each art form has its own distinctive medium, a medium that distinguishes it from other art forms . . . the medium qua essence dictates what is suitable to do with the medium” (Carroll 1996: 49).

Carroll (1996) contends that early film theorists such as Kracauer and Arnheim employ the doctrine of medium specificity as a means of legitimizing the new medium of film as an art form. They proposed that the medium determines notions of aesthetic value and the medium-specific ‘property’ would be that which makes the most extensive or innovative use of the particularities of the medium. For instance, the aesthetical privilege in film rests on the use of the camera and montage; whereas in theater, media specificity implies a concentration on the presence of a live audience and/or a performance style not reliant on modern technology.

The doctrine of media specificity began to be problematized again in the 1960s, particularly in the context of film and theater. In her insightful essay on film and theater, Susan Sontag, one of the first scholars to specifically argue against media specificity, dissected the two mediums and questioned the idea of an “unbridgeable division, even opposition between the two arts” (1966: 24). As the above quote implies, she expounded the significance of transmediality across cinema and theater and pointed out that “what’s important is that no definition or characterisation of theater and cinema, even the most self-evident, be taken for granted” (Sontag 1966: 36). Most importantly, she argues for a transmedial comparison moving beyond the elementary material properties. For instance, the dimensions of *space* and *time* can be similarly manipulated across film and theater (Sontag 1966: 36). Narrative thematics can also be analogously realized across the two media. Her example in thematics was how “art as an act of violence” can be seen in both cinema and theater influenced by the then pervasive Futurist and Surrealist aesthetics (Sontag 1966: 37). Instead of comparing the material elements of each medium, Sontag espoused an approach anchored in an analytical dimension of what this present chapter labels as *discourse*, for example, spatio-temporal structures and narrative themes and events. As the remainder of this chapter will show, this is a dimension reflecting the viewers’ path of narrative prediction and representing how they interpret meanings; and this is a dimension distinct from material properties or technical elements used within each medium.

Some aspects of cross-media comparison between film and theater were also suggested by Bazin (1967) in his collection of essays on filmmakers’ creative choices to explore film devices for theatrical conventions. Bazin favored cinematic space portrayed by the long take because, analogous to a

theater stage, it presents the unity of space and the relationship between the characters and objects within that space. For Bazin, long takes not only give viewers the freedom to direct their attentions to what to look at during the viewing process, but they also maintain the ambiguity of the cinema space and the present space around the viewers.

Tseng (2016) discusses the point about viewers' freedom of attention choices with respect to how dynamic multiple film images using CGI (e.g., split screens in *HULK* [2003]) actually offer minimal freedom for the spectator's viewing routes, although several scholars argue for the opposite (cf. Elsaesser 1998; Provencher 2008; Tudor 2008). Other film spatial designs using static camera and long takes, such as films by Haneke, Ozu, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, provide more viewing freedoms and more dynamic routes for the spectator. This comparison is made on the basis of distinguishing *material* and *discursive* dynamisms. The dynamic materials of multiple frames used in mainstream films are often loaded with explicit *cohesive devices* that direct the viewers to certain predesigned routes of meaning interpretation. In other words, these cohesive devices embedded in the dynamic materials actually yield stable and restricted discourse meaning patterns. As the next sections will show, the distinction between levels of materiality and discourse will also be a significant starting point for the analytical pursuit of this chapter. In other words, anchoring the cross-media comparative analysis at the level of discourse, rather than at the level of material, can effectively reveal in what way theatrical devices and conventions are adopted in cinema.

### 3 Analytical Strata: Discourse and Materiality of Theatrical Devices in Film

Several studies in film have shown that a general distinction needs to be made between narrative/discourse interpretation and audio-visual devices. This distinction is particularly significant when examining the evolution and functions of film style. More specifically, it has been frequently argued that a high degree of narrative and discourse stability is the basis of narrative inference and genre expectation for spectators, despite the gradually dynamic deployment of audio-visual devices in recent decades. For instance, Bordwell (2016) identifies major features of spatial-temporal styles that have been astonishingly robust throughout the evolution of Hollywood filmmaking. Jones (2015b) compares 3D and 2D formats and shows how they function similarly in terms of continuity and narrative effect. These discussions by Bordwell and Jones both argue that despite the changes of visual techniques over time such as shorter average shot lengths, the use of wider range lenses of 3D format and computer-generated images, the composition of "space, time, and narrative relations (such as causal connections and parallels)" in mainstream films remains straightforward to identify and leads the viewer to effortless comprehension and prediction of film narrative (Bordwell 2002)

The distinction between filmic meaning and materials is shown in the diagram in Figure 7.1. The analytical levels are developed for film building on the theoretical notion of *semiotic stratification*, in particular, on the distinction between a semiotic stratum of discourse and one of form (cf. Martin 1992). The left part of the diagram is the stratified framework generally divided into materials at the bottom level and discourse, genre/ideology at the higher levels. The distinction is reminiscent of stratification that occurs in semiotic approaches such as the distinctions of expression plane and content plane by Hjelmslev (1953). The more important notion, as far as meaning making in audio-visual media is concerned, is the interrelationship between these strata. These strata are interrelated by *realization*: that is, film discourse configurations are ‘realized in’ material configurations and, conversely, material configurations provide evidence for discourse configurations. At the highest level, genre and ideological meaning is realized in ‘discourse’ configurations. On the basis of this framework, what needs to be particularly noted is that a single type of material or film devices does not lead directly to any specific kind of meaning interpretation. For instance, as mentioned in the previous section, the film device ‘dynamic multiple frame’ does not directly guide the viewers to more dynamic and multiple meaning interpretation processes. Another example is the film device of the point-of-view shot. The use of the point of view-shot does not directly function to enhance character engagement in film (cf. Smith 1994: 39).

Applying the analytical strata to theatricality in film, we can also distinguish film theater materials from theater discursive strategies. The former encompasses theater settings and decorations. Some examples are shown in screenshots in Figures 7.2a–c: such as some theater settings in ANNA KARENINA (2012, Joe Wright) and in THE GANG OF FOUR (1989, Jacques Rivette), parts of SYNECDOCHE, NEW YORK (2008, Charlie Kaufman) set in a warehouse built for a theater. In these films with filmed theaters, some parts of the plot space and story space are set in theaters. Nevertheless, these partial theater settings and decorations do not guide the viewer to interpret space analogous to the theatrical space. Rather, these films use conventional film editing strategies such as cuts across different plot spaces, close-ups, and intensified continuity (Bordwell 2002). Hence, the viewers’ spatial navigation process is guided by the conventional devices of mainstream films.

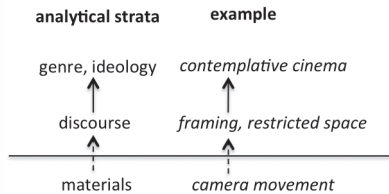


Figure 7.1 Strata of Meaning Realization in Film Analysis

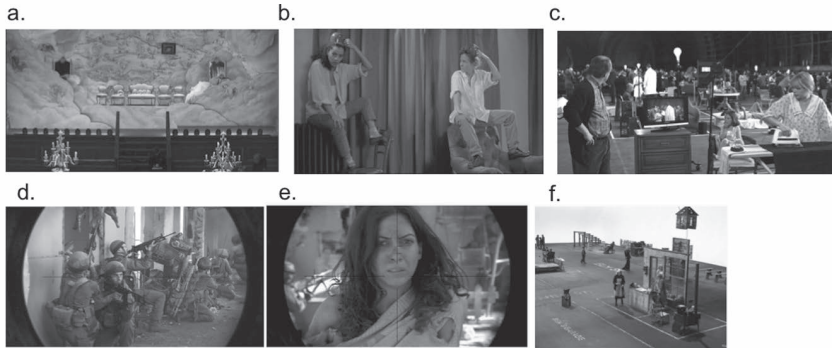


Figure 7.2 Example Screenshots of Films With Substantial Theater Settings and Decorations (a. ANNA KARENINA [2012, Joe Wright], b. THE GANG OF FOUR [1989, Jacques Rivette], c. SYNECDOCHE NEW YORK [2008, Charlie Kaufman]. Screenshots of restricted spatiality: d. and e. from LEBANON [2010, Samuel Maoz]. Screenshots of a filmed theater: f. DOGVILLE [2003, Lars von Trier])

At the other end of the spectrum, film devices such as static camera, long takes, confined space, etc., realize discourse patterns of framing and restricted spatiality. Films with configurations combining these devices resemble theatrical space more closely. A basic framework for analyzing the discourse devices of theatrical space in film will be discussed extensively in the next section. Before broaching the framework development, how the semiotic analytical strata are applied to the theatricality of film is represented in the right part of Figure 7.1. At the middle stratum of discourse are two examples of the discourse devices *framing* and *restricted space*. Framing functions to shape the spectators' attention within certain parts of screen space, while restricted space is used when plot space is confined mostly to a closed space, for example, the confined spaces within an apartment in Haneke's AMOUR (2012) or Hitchcock's DIAL M FOR MURDER (1954) and ROPE (1948). These are supported by configurations of certain lower-level material devices, such as a more static use of camera, and manipulation of lighting and darkness for framing. At the highest level of meaning, a *contemplative* mood often permeates films with more tranquil styles and muted emotion using static camera and minimal editing. The next section will discuss a fundamental set of discursive devices of film space and how the instantiation of these devices cues the viewer to meaning interpretation in a way comparable to theatrical space.

#### 4 Discourse Framework of Filmic Spatiality

The discourse system of film space describes the mechanisms that realize *the spectator's navigation within and beyond the screen space in which a story*

*event takes place*, that is, whether within a restricted plot space or beyond visible on-screen space. The system is presented in Figure 7.3 and is modeled as a system network. In the theory of systemic-functional linguistics, such networks are used to show the abstract paradigmatic ‘choices’ available for language users drawn from the meaning potential of their language (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004).

The filmic system in Figure 7.3 shows the functional potential for cueing the viewers within and across the space constructed throughout a film. In these networks, square brackets connect contrasting options together into systems: for instance, in the system of [implied space/explicit space] only one of the two features may be selected at a time. The networks can also employ simultaneously available systems represented by grouping systems together with a curly right-facing bracket. In Figure 7.3, for example, choices need to be made from the features presented by the systems of SPATIAL RESTRICTION, FOREGROUNDING, and CONNECTEDNESS, thereby giving rise to sometimes quite extensive cross-classification. The discourse function of each choice in the networks is elucidated below. Throughout the description, the potential features or feature combinations for realizing theatrical space in film will also be highlighted.

**Implied Space vs. Explicit Space**

A film event can be *explicitly* shown on the screen. It can also be *implied* verbally in the characters’ dialogues, namely, the story space that is never explicitly shown to the viewers but only imagined by the viewers. These features particularly highlight the *multimodal* nature of the entire framework, using cross-modal resources such as audio and verbal modes.

The system choice [implied space] is substantially used when a parallel, explicit event space employs [restricted space], the choice within the system

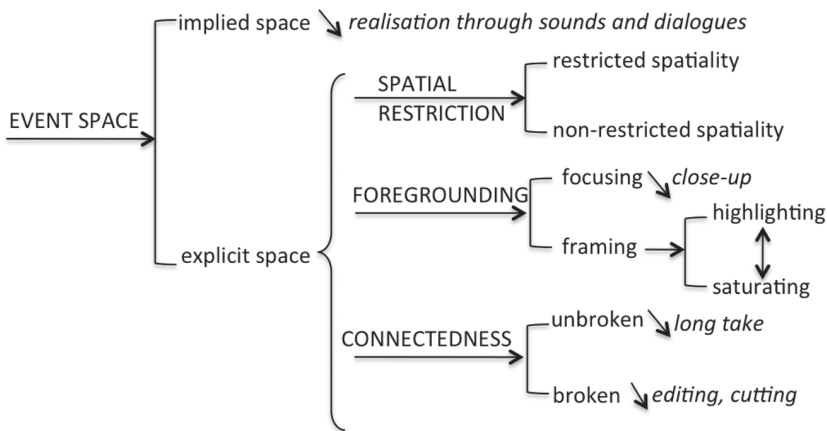


Figure 7.3 Basic System Networks of Spatial Discourse in Film



SPATIAL RESTRICTION elucidated below. Similar to the theater stage, one of the main strategies in film to expand narrative space is to let characters talk about previous events in other story spaces (cf. Hanich 2014).

An event space can also be suggested in the audio track, implied as an existing off-screen space. This strategy is often used in Haneke's films such as in *CACHÉ* (2005), *THE WHITE RIBBON* (2009), and *AMOUR* (2012). Invisible implied space cued by audio elements often functions to create disturbing effects and suspense (cf. Saxton 2007; Stewart 2010). For instance, in *THE WHITE RIBBON*, most violent scenes are implied. One particular example is a scene of family violence in which the brother and sister are beaten by their pastor father for being late for dinner. During the beating scene, the viewer is positioned down a hallway and is not able to explicitly witness the violent event, although each beating sound is clearly audible. The director's manipulation of implied, off-screen space disturbs the viewers by making the violent space invisible, while pushing the viewers to construct a narrative path through it.

Another striking example of implied space is a famous scene in Lynch's *MULHOLLAND DRIVE* (2001). In the scene at Club Silencio, one stunning moment is when the main characters Betty (Naomi Watts) and Rita (Laura Herring) clutch each other and weep during the singer Rebekah Del Rio's singing of a Spanish translation of Roy Orbison's 'Crying' (*Llorando*). The singer abruptly collapses, while the music continues without her—this sudden shift of sound perspectives powerfully enhances the audience's awareness of another implied space and adds new information to the viewer's expectations concerning the explicit space of the sound origin.

### *Restricted Spatiality vs. Non-restricted Spatiality*

Events of a film can take place substantially within a confined space, be it an apartment, a room, a phone booth, an airplane, a boat, or an elevator, etc. Restricted and non-restricted spatiality are modeled as a continuum in the network because a film can be set completely within a wrap-around space such as Hitchcock's *ROPE* (1948) or mostly within a space such as Haneke's *AMOUR* (2012), where only the short opening scene is set outside the main characters' apartment. Moving further to the other end of the continuum, films such as *APOLLO 13* (1993) are set between the confined space of a spacecraft and other places on earth such as NASA, main characters' homes, etc.

The restricted spatiality in film derives from a theatrical design, which was one of the main spatial strategies in the beginning of last century. Bordwell and Thompson (2003: 95–96) relate this strategy to the German *Kammerspiel* or 'chamber play' film style, influenced by expressionism in the 1920s. The *Kammerspiel* cinema restricted itself to minimal settings and focused the stories on confrontations between characters. With a *Kammerspiel* aesthetic, the space of the stage is completely permeable. Although the

actors are confined within the space, the camera is often fluid and dynamic; namely, the camera is located within and around the space. The viewers can observe the entire space from different angles of the space. According to Bordwell, the Kammerspiel films, such as Hitchcock's *DIAL M FOR MURDER*, *ROPE* and the films from the early 1920s, for example, Carl Dreyer's *MICHAEL* (1924) and *THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE* (1925), feel both theatrical and cinematic—they all have the confined stage design of a theater with the dynamic tools of camera.<sup>1</sup> The combined use of confined theatrical and cinematic space is particularly stressed by Hitchcock in an interview with Truffaut on filming *DIAL M FOR MURDER*: “As a result, ‘Dial M’ is more of a filmed play than a motion picture . . . using cinematic means to narrate a story taken from a stage play” (Truffaut 1967: 156–159).

Another comparable example of a ‘filmed play’ is von Trier’s *DOGVILLE*, which is a mixture of genres of avant-garde theater and a social realism parody (Grodal 2005: 129). The event space throughout the film is confined to a theater stage with minimal design. Figure 7.2f shows a screenshot of the film. Similar to Hitchcock’s strategy, the film contains a theatrical space with cinematic strategies for narration. The camera is fluid and is inserted among the performers. It is a similar blend of theater and cinema as Hitchcock’s *DIAL M* or Dreyer’s Kammerspiel films—a confined theater-like stage with completely permeable cinematic space.

Another interesting case using semi-restricted space is also worth mentioning here. The war film *LEBANON* (2010) is a particularly interesting example of confined space use. It is a compact war film focusing on a group of Israeli soldiers operating a tank in hostile territory during the 1982 conflict in Lebanon. Hindered by tight quarters, limited visibility and stifling heat, the soldiers inside the tank begin to quarrel amongst themselves, leaving themselves open to attack by their Lebanese enemies. Example screenshots of the film are displayed in Figure 7.2d and 7.2e. Many scenes of the film use the limited, rounded-off perspective of the frames (implying the soldiers’ perspective from the tank toward the battlefield outside). *Lebanon* uses the feature of restricted space to express a cramped and suffocating atmosphere, while expanding plot space through cutting to the outside space as viewed by the soldiers.

### *Focusing vs. Framing, Highlighting vs. Saturating*

Two further subsystems are modeled under the system of [explicit space]: the subsystems of *FOREGROUNDING* and *CONNECTEDNESS*. That means, when [explicit space] is chosen, two further features from the subsystems can be selected. These subsystems deal with how the spectator’s spatial navigation is guided on the screen.

The feature [focusing] is the strategy that cues salient elements to the spectator; that is, how the viewers’ attention should proceed is driven by *close-ups* through camera zoom-in during long takes, scene breakdown, or

crosscutting. To date it is almost the default approach in most parts of the filmmaking world.

Distinctively, the feature [framing] functions to provide spatial information through theater-like elaborate performance and staging filmed from a longer distance, termed by Bordwell as *tableau cinema* (cf. Bordwell 2005). Two more features are included under [framing]: [highlighting] and [saturating], which are two opposite ends of a continuum. [Highlighting] explicitly leads the viewers' attention to significant narrative elements, whereas [saturating] shows an overview of an event space without specific, foregrounded elements. The different degrees of highlighting and saturating are represented in Figure 7.4. Figures 7.4a and 7.4b are screenshots from Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *FLOWERS OF SHANGHAI* (1998), which explores different devices for highlighting which characters and actions should receive the attention of the spectator, for example, manipulation of lighting and darkness, slight movement of the camera to carve out foreground and middle ground, or center and peripheral positions. Figure 7.4c is a screenshot from Hou's *THE ASSASSIN* (2015). A few scenes of the film start with landscapes filmed in a long take lasting a few seconds before any noticeable characters or objects enter into the saturated space to which the viewer should pay attention. Figure 7.4d shows the framing style between the two ends of [highlighting] and [saturating]. Several scenes in the film are portrayed in this way—characters and some carriages are filmed from a very long distance in a protracted long take, immersed in the saturated space.

### *Unbroken vs. Broken Connectedness*

The system of FOREGROUNDING is cross-classified with the system of CONNECTEDNESS. It refers to the discourse devices of how the contiguous event space is shown to the viewers, either with or without any spatio-temporal gap. [Unbroken connectedness] refers to spatial contiguity without any temporal gap. That is, the event time flows equivalently to the real time, minute by minute. It is often realized by a long take such as the long temporal chunks of unbroken spatial connectedness in *BIRDMAN* (2014), Hitchcock's *ROPE*, and the German film *VICTORIA* (2015), which are composed as one single long take.



*Figure 7.4* Screenshots of Hou Hsiao-Hsien's Films Showing Different Framing Devices in *FLOWERS OF SHANGHAI* (1998) (a and b) and *THE ASSASSIN* (2015) (c and d)

Locating the viewers in exactly the same spatio-temporal frame as the characters yields a restricted narration (see Chapter 3 in Bordwell and Thompson 2010). It confines the audience's range of knowledge to what the characters know. One major affective function of restricted narration is that it effectively builds curiosity, uncertainty, and surprises if we know no more than the characters involved in story events.

An interesting contrast is offered in the similar compact temporal structure in the film *HIGH NOON* (1952). In this film, the characters' actions unfold intensively within 2 hours. In other words, the viewers experience nearly an identical time flow as the characters do in the film. Nevertheless, the film employs [broken connectedness], realized by constant cuts across different event spaces, which broadens the viewers' narrative knowledge and yields omnipresent story information. It is a strategy very often used in maximizing suspense in the genre of thrillers.

To this point, the description of the features modeled in Figure 7.3 generally reveals that one significant trait of film spatial discourse is that of two opposing styles: theatrically oriented staging and non-theatrical, purely cinematic style realized by cutting and editing. To formulate the contention in another way, the examples discussed above also show that the theatrically oriented style becomes prominent when one or more of these features are selected and combined: [restricted spatiality], [framing], and [unbroken connectedness]. This point will be further supported by the instantiation of the networks in the next section. As the analysis of *THE ASSASSIN* will show, the discourse analysis of film event space is a systematic way to uncover the transmedial tropes of theatricality embedded in cinema.

## 5 Two Example Analyses: Event Space in *THE ASSASSIN* (2015)

*THE ASSASSIN* is Hou's first martial arts movie. Several parts of the film employ the director's typical slow and off-center storytelling devices, a distanced sense of camera placement, and an attentiveness to stage framing. Nevertheless, Hou uses masterful blends of theatrical and cinematic tropes to make his martial arts movie look markedly different from any of its genre forebears.

### 5.1 *Mixture of Genre Features in the Prologue*

The differences are made clear in the prologue of the film. Selected screenshots of the prologue are shown in Figure 7.5. These scenes, which total 6'6", are composed of only 17 shots in high-contrast black and white and make up four scenes (Scenes A–D in Figure 7.5). The film centers on the female character Nie Yinniang, a trained assassin, in 8th century China during the Tang Dynasty (the character in black in Shot 1). The first shot shows that she is being directed to kill a corrupt government official by her master,



Figure 7.5 Selected Screenshots of the 17 Shots of the Beginning Scenes of Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *THE ASSASSIN* (2015) (Image numbers refer to shot numbers [00:00:00–00:03:40].)

a nun named Jiaxin (the character in white in Shot 1). Shot 2 starts the second scene, Scene B. Scene B (Shots 2–10) portrays how Nie Yinniang fulfills her duty—coolly and swiftly slaying a man on horseback. This is followed by Scene C, in which she displays mercy and fails her duty when she confronts another target and, moved by the presence of his young son, chooses to spare his life. This event leads to Scene D (Shots 16 and 17), in which Jiaxin decides to test her resolve by assigning her a difficult duty: She has to return to Weibo, her home province in northern China, to kill her cousin, also the governor Tian Ji'an, to whom she had once been betrothed.

Table 7.1 shows the instantiation of the film's spatial system of events across the four scenes depicted in the prologue. Here it is necessary to provide a specific definition of what exactly *event* refers to in this framework. Generally, events are things that happen, requiring a reference to a location in time. More specifically, an event is “a segment of time at a given location that is conceived by an observer to have a beginning and an end” (Zacks and Tversky 2001: 3). Things that exist outside of such a temporal reference such as physical objects (e.g., mountains, apples) and psychological objects

Table 7.1 Instantiation of the Film's Spatial Discourse Systems in the Beginning Scenes of THE ASSASSIN

<i>Scene</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Discourse Features Selected</i>
A	E1	[non-restricted space] + [framing/highlighting] + [unbroken connectedness]
	E2	[non-restricted space] + [implied space]
B	Ea	[non-restricted space] + [framing/saturating-highlighting] + [unbroken connectedness]
	Eb	[non-restricted space] + [focusing] + [broken connectedness]
	Ec	[non-restricted space] + [framing/saturating] + [unbroken connectedness]
C	E1	[non-restricted space] + [framing/highlighting] + [unbroken connectedness]
	E2	[non-restricted space] + [focusing] + [broken connectedness]
D	Ea	[non-restricted space] + [framing/saturating-highlighting] + [unbroken connectedness]
	Eb	[non-restricted space] + [framing/highlighting] + [unbroken connectedness]

(e.g., ideas, concepts) are not events (Shipley and Zacks 2008: 1–2). In other words, an object itself is not an event but events occur when objects change or interact. For instance, as we will also see in the following analysis, THE ASSASSIN often uses protracted long takes fixing at rather static objects or places after the events end or before events start, especially before anything dynamic catches the viewers' attention. These objects/settings are not events in isolation but they function as phases within events.

In Table 7.1, scene A shows the first event of the film, E1. It uses the device of [non-restricted space] because the slow panning at the beginning of the shot explicitly shows the viewers the location as set somewhere in the woods. [Non-restricted space] is employed in the following scenes and events when the spectator is guided to different event spaces. The first shot uses a long take lasting 25 seconds, and employing the feature of [framing/highlighting] + [unbroken connectedness]. A parallel event, E2, takes place in an implied space. It is an event narrated by Jiaxin about the targets of Nie Yinniang's duties. Jiaxin describes the unforgivable sins that the officials have done in the past.

[Implied space] is frequently used in this film. Similar to theatrical performance, the pasts of the characters are often narrated rather than shown. The viewers cannot see the event space. It requires the viewers' imagination following the verbal descriptions.

In THE ASSASSIN, when a past event needs to be depicted in detail, instead of using flashback, the theatrical feature of verbalized implied space is often used, realized in a long monologue in a sustained shot.

The second scene, Scene B, includes one event broken down into three phases (labeled as Ea, Eb, and Ec): It starts with Ea, the saturated overview of the entire setting in the woods and mountains. Within the sustained shot, the horses and carriages of the official slowly enter into the space. Hence, the devices selected are [framing/saturating-highlighting] and [unbroken connectedness]. This is followed by Eb, the next phase of Nie Yinniang's execution of the official (Shots 3–10). Her act is pulled off with fast, unerring skill in front of and behind the camera. The depiction uses a whiplash edit that temporarily subverts Hou's usual aesthetics of long and slow theatrical staging. Discourse devices chosen are [focusing] realized by close-ups of Nie Yinniang and [broken connectedness] realized by cuts. The next phase in the event, Ec, is saturated space, permeated with a tranquil mood in the woods without any foregrounded elements. Hence the features used here are [framing/saturating] + [unbroken connectedness].

Scene C shows Nie Yinniang's next duty of murdering another official. The scene begins with a protracted long take (Shot 12) lasting 1'40,' using [framing/highlighting] and [unbroken connectedness] to present a rather complete picture of the official's interaction with his family. It is then followed by the confrontation event: Nie Yinniang shows herself in front of the official and decides to spare him. The official stands up and throws his sword at her, which is then caught and thrown away by her. As with the execution event in scene B, the confrontation event between Nie Yinniang and the official uses [focusing] and [broken connectedness] to realize her swift and precise actions.

Finally, Scene D shows Nie Yinniang returning to her master in the mountain. Similarly, to Scene B, it starts with a saturated space (Ea under Scene D), the temple in the mountain, before some remote, moving white figures catch the viewers' attention. The features used are [framing/saturating-highlighting] + [unbroken connectedness]. The next shot is a sustained long take, first showing Nie Yinniang kneeling in front of her master before Jiixin walks out of the room. The entire scene lasts around 50 seconds, and employs [framing/highlighting] + [unbroken connectedness].

The configuration of the spatial patterns across the four scenes is mapped out in Figure 7.6. The patterns explicitly uncover an *auteur* feature traceable throughout the entire film: [framing/saturating-highlighting] and [unbroken connectedness] are often used to realize theatrical-oriented staging. This is mapped out in the left-hand side of Figure 7.6 and this spatial pattern is constructed when the event space functions to show an overall picture of the scene or when story events deal with more static interactions between characters such as dialogues or scenes without physical confrontations. In contrast, the pattern on the right-hand side of Figure 7.6 shows typical cinematic spatial strategy, employing [focusing] and [broken connectedness], realized by editing-based techniques. These devices are always used when events depict characters' *wuxia* actions, the sword-fighting scenes typical of the martial arts film genre.

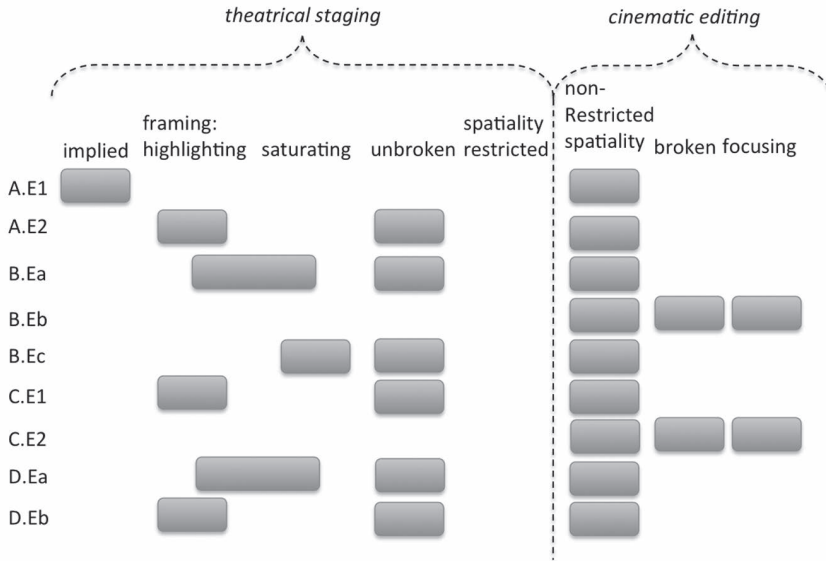


Figure 7.6 Patterns Constructed From The Features Used, as Described in Table 7.1

As the discourse analysis here shows, the features presented are able to track stylistic choices at a more fine-grained level than previously, and this is precisely how a functional semiotic discourse analysis differs from problem-solving approaches (cf. Bordwell 2007). This analytical strength will be further highlighted in the following example analyses.

### 5.2 Mixture of Transmedial Features Within One Scene

The next analysis shows how a subtle mixture of theatrical and cinematic devices within one scene can be highlighted through spatial discourse analysis. Figure 7.7 shows the screenshots of a 6-minute scene. This scene depicts a long monologue by Nie Yinniang’s mother addressed to Nie after she has been sent back home by her master Jiaxin. The monologue includes detailed descriptions about past events and the reasons why Nie was not able to marry her cousin Tian Ji’an.

This scene contains only six shots. The first shot is a typical sustained long take lasting more than 1 minute. It tracks Nie Yinniang entering into the room, greeting her grandmother and then walking to and sitting next to her mother. Table 7.2 is the instantiation of the film’s spatial system of the events within this scene. First of all, as shown in the previous example, the film uses [non-restricted spatiality] and a lasting long take showing contiguous event space is realized by [framing/highlighting] and [unbroken





Figure 7.7 Selected Screenshots of the Total Six Shots of a 6-Minute Scene in THE ASSASSIN (2015) (Image numbers refer to the shot numbers [00:14:32–00:20:02].)

Table 7.2 Instantiation of the Film’s Spatial Discourse Systems in the Scene Transcribed in Figure 7.7

Shot	Event	Discourse Features Selected
1	E1	[non-restricted space] + [framing/highlighting] + [unbroken connectedness]
2–5	E2.1	[non-restricted space] + [implied space]
2–5	E2.2	[non-restricted space] + [focusing] + [broken connectedness]
6	E3	[non-restricted space] + [framing/highlighting] + [unbroken connectedness]

connectedness]. Shots 2–5 encompass two phases. E2.1 is verbally described by Nie’s mother, using the feature [implied space], and a parallel event E2.2 is her ‘verbal action,’ namely talking to Nie. Although with a slow pace, E2.2 nevertheless employs typical cinematic continuity tools to show a close-up of the jade handed to Nie by her mother, and to cut between Nie and her mother during her monologue. In this event space, [focusing] and [broken connectedness] are employed. Finally, the spatial design of the last shot returns to Hou’s typical theater-staging style with slow panning and a protracted long take to depict Nie covering her face weeping. The features

employed are the same as the first event of this scene: [framing/highlighting] and [unbroken connectedness].

The configuration of the spatial patterns across the four scenes is mapped out in Figure 7.8. Again, Hou’s auteur patterns are shown here: scenes often start and end with event space oriented to theater staging, while some cinematic devices are used when the depiction of two characters’ interaction is pursued.

### 5.3 Spatial Discourse Patterns of the Entire Film

Across the entire film, THE ASSASSIN has around 44 scenes. Several scenes are composed of only one event framed in one long protracted shot. Table 7.3 shows the overall discourse patterns across the entire film.

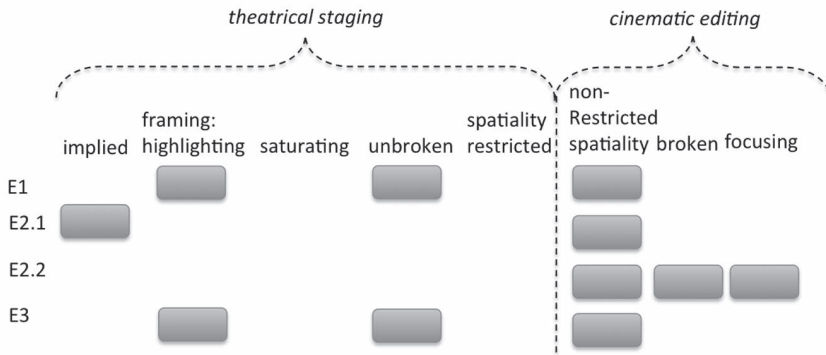


Figure 7.8 Patterns Constructed From the Features Used as Described in Table 7.2

Table 7.3 Discourse Patterns of the Entire Film Across 45 Scenes (Sc: scene, Im-Pl: implied space, Fr-HL: framing-highlighting, Fr-SR: framing-saturating, Un-Br: unbroken connectedness, Re-St: restricted spatiality, No-Re: non-restricted spatiality, Br: broken connectedness, Foc: focusing. The shading in the table distinguishes conventional cinematic styles from theatrical-oriented elements.)

Sc	Event	Im-Pl	Fr-HL	Fr-SR	Un-Br	Re-St	No-Re	Br	Foc
1	(See Fig. 7.6) prologue E1	X					X		
	Prologue E2		X		X		X		
2	Prologue Ea		X	X	X		X		
	Prologue Eb						X	X	X
	Prologue Ec			X	X		X		
3	Prologue E1		X		X		X		
	Prologue E2						X	X	X

(Continued)

Table 7.3 (Continued)

<i>Sc</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Im-Pl</i>	<i>Fr-HL</i>	<i>Fr-SR</i>	<i>Un-Br</i>	<i>Re-St</i>	<i>No-Re</i>	<i>Br</i>	<i>Foc</i>
4	Prologue Ea		X	X	X		X		
	Prologue Eb		X		X		X		
5	Film title		X		X		X		
6	In the room of Nie's mother. A servant reports that Nie is sent back home by her master Jiaxin.		X		X		X		
7	E1: Nie and Jiaxin wait in a room.		X		X		X		
	E2: Nie's mother comes out from her room, greets Jiaxin and walks her out.		X		X		X		
8	Servants prepare for bath.		X				X		X
9	Unidentifiable horse riders ride through mountains.		X		X		X		
10	E1: Nie in bathtub.		X		X		X		
	E2: Nie's flashback shows princess Jiachen playing a zither and narrating a tragic story.		X		X		X		
11	Servants help Nie to put on her dress, while she is still thinking about Jiachen, who is again presented in the same flashback.		X				X		X
12	E1: Nie enters a room, greets her grandmother and walks to her mother (see Fig. 7.8).		X		X		X		
	E2a: Story events narrated by Nie's mother	X					X		
	E2b: Nie's mother shows Nie a piece of jade and talks to Nie.						X		X X
	E3: Nie weeps.		X		X		X		
13	Ea: Palace roof			X	X		X		
	Eb: One official's reporting can be heard implying an off-screen space.	X					X		
	Ec: In the palace of the king, Tian Ji'an, his officers are reporting and discussing.		X				X		X
14	Nie observes Tian playing with his son.		X				X		

<i>Sc</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Im-Pl</i>	<i>Fr-HL</i>	<i>Fr-SR</i>	<i>Un-Br</i>	<i>Re-St</i>	<i>No-Re</i>	<i>Br</i>	<i>Foc</i>
15	A guard walks out and seems to see something.		X		X		X		
16	E1: Tian's children are playing balls.		X		X		X		
	E2: Tian's wife walked into the garden and seems to see something.		X		X		X		
	E3: Palace guards are fighting with Nie.						X	X	X
17	Tian enters into the room of his wife, Lady Tian, and children and sits beside them.		X		X		X		
18	A masked female sword-fighter seems (presumably Lady Tian) to observe something in the woods.		X		X		X		
19	At night, a horse rider dashes to a house.		X		X		X		
20	Nie's mother, the horse rider, enters into a room where her brother, Tian-Xing, also Tian's official, is sickened. Nie's father, Nie-Feng, tells her that Tian is offended by Tian-Xing's candid suggestions and re-positions him in a remote city.		X		X		X		
21	E1: Tian's concubine Huji awaits Tian before he enters in the room, sits beside her and complains about the cowardice of his officials.		X		X		X		
	E2: Nie enters their room. Tian chases her to the roof and fights with her.						X	X	X
	E3a: Tian returns to the room and starts to tell Huji his past stories with Nie.		X		X		X		
	E4: Story events of Tian and Nie's childhood.	X					X		
	E5: Nie is seen still observing Tian and Huji.		X		X		X		

(Continued)

Table 7.3 (Continued)

<i>Sc</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Im-Pl</i>	<i>Fr-HL</i>	<i>Fr-SR</i>	<i>Un-Br</i>	<i>Re-St</i>	<i>No-Re</i>	<i>Br</i>	<i>Foc</i>
22	In the room of Nie Yinniang's parents. A servant came in to report that Tian wants to see Nie-Feng.		X		X		X		
23	Nie stares at Huji in her room while she is asleep.		X		X		X		
24	In the palace, Tian entrusts Nie's father to accompany and protect his Tian-Xing on the journey to his new position.		X				X	X	
25	In the room of Lady Tien, a servant reports that Huji is pregnant.		X		X		X		
26	Tian and his guard walk to the palace garden and check around.		X		X		X		
27	Ea: Mountain view Eb: At the mountain, Nie-Feng, Tian-Xing and their servants and guards are departing.		X	X	X		X	X	
28	A soldier enters into a room of an unidentifiable old man seen from the back and reports his preparation and plan to assassinate the group of Nie-Feng and Tian-Xing.		X		X		X		
29	Some horse riders, presumably the soldiers sent by the old man in the previous scene, depart for their duty to assassinate Nie-Feng and Tian-Xing.		X		X		X		
30	The soldiers fight with and wound Nie-Feng and Tian-Xing before Mirror Polisher, a sword-fighter who happens to be in the woods, hears the fight and tries to save them. Nie Yinniang arrives later and kills the assassins.						X	X	X

<i>Sc</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Im-Pl</i>	<i>Fr-HL</i>	<i>Fr-SR</i>	<i>Un-Br</i>	<i>Re-St</i>	<i>No-Re</i>	<i>Br</i>	<i>Foc</i>
31	Nie Yinniang, wounded Tian-Xing and Nie-Feng and Mirror Polisher walk through mountains for days and arrive in a remote village		X				X	X	
32	In a dark room, Nie Yinniang treats her father.		X				X	X	
33	E1a: Views of woods and village in the dawn.			X			X		
	E1b: Mirror Polisher gets up and leaves the room.		X				X	X	
	E2a: Nie Yinniang walks in the woods, while the masked sword-fighter (presumably Lady Tian) seems to be looking for her.		X				X	X	
	E2b: Sword fighting between Nie Yinniang and Lady Tian						X	X	X
	E2c: Lady Tian's mask on the ground, cut in half (presumably by Nie Yinniang)		X		X		X		
	E3: Mirror Polisher finds her.		X		X		X		
34	Mirror Polisher treats the wounded Nie Yinniang in the village room.		X				X	X	
35	Huji and Tian dance in the palace celebration.		X				X	X	
36	The old man, previously seen in Scene 28, is practicing some witchery.		X				X	X	
37	Ea: Night view of Tian's palace			X		X	X		
	Eb: Huji walks into the palace gallery with other dancers and seems to be hit by witchcraft. She falls down before Nie Yinniang comes to relieve her from the spell.		X		X		X		
	Ec: Tian arrives, mistakes Nie Yinniang for						X	X	X

(Continued)

Table 7.3 (Continued)

<i>Sc</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Im-Pl</i>	<i>Fr-HL</i>	<i>Fr-SR</i>	<i>Un-Br</i>	<i>Re-St</i>	<i>No-Re</i>	<i>Br</i>	<i>Foc</i>
	practicing the witchery and fights with her until Nie Yinniang tells Tian that Huji is pregnant.								
38	Tian's guard finds, a burned paper figure, the evidence of the witchcraft placed on Huji.	X		X			X		
39	Tian's guard brings the paper figure to Tian.	X		X			X		
40	After realizing that the witchcraft was practiced by Lady Tian and her master, Tian comes to her room and destroys things in her room with rage.	X		X			X		
41	In Tian's palace, Tian is routinely listening to his officials' reports and discussions.	X		X			X		
42	E1: Master Jiaxin stands on a mountain. Nie comes to inform Jiaxin of her decision that she will not kill Tian.	X		X			X		
	E2: After Nie Yinniang leaves, Jiaxin follows Nie down and fights with Nie.						X	X	X
43	Ea: Village views	X		X			X		
	Eb: Nie arrives in the village where Mirror Polisher is waiting for her.	X		X			X		
44	Final scene. Remote backviews of Nie and Mirror Polisher leaving the village.	X		X			X		

The analysis across the entire film shows that there are three main types of spatial discourse patterns:

- 1 Conventional cinematic patterns using cuts, focusing, and editing devices. These patterns are realized in sword-fighting scenes (Scenes 2-Eb, 3-E2, 16-E3, 21-E2, 30, 33-E2b, 37-Ec, 42-E2) and some scenes

- where the jade, the symbol of Nie Yinniang and Tian's marital bond, is shown in close-up (Scenes 2-Eb, 3-E2, 12-E2b).
- 2 Most parts of the film are realized by features of theatrical staging. These scenes employ long takes to realize unbroken connectedness and use slow pan or characters' actions to highlight framing and to shape the spectators' attention. In addition, some scenes begin with saturated images of landscape, mostly functioning as an initial phase of an event. In a few scenes, it functions differently from an establishing shot in that it does not show the exact places of the coming events. Rather, it shows some views of the off-screen space, which is not directly related to the exact space where the story events take place (e.g., Scenes 13-Ea, 27-Ea, 33-E1a, 37-Ea).
  - 3 Some scenes use blends of theatrical and cinematic styles by combining framing and broken connectedness. These scenes employ rather protracted shots to depict character actions; nevertheless, they use cuts or point-of-view editing to show different spatial perspectives (Scenes 11, 13-Ec, 14, 24, 32, 33-E1b, 33-E2a, 34, 35, 36) and elliptical editing to depict the progress of a longer process or journey (Scenes 8, 31, 27-Eb).

The overall deployment of the three types of spatial patterns is visualized in Figure 7.9. The black patterns refer to typical cinematic spatial designs. The grey patterns are theatrical-oriented space and the textured patterns represent the blending of cinematic and theatrical devices. The overall pattern deployment immediately shows the empirical result of our hypothesis; although *THE ASSASSIN* is a martial-art film, the *auteur* pattern of Hou is nevertheless prominent. The spatial design of theatrical staging dominates most parts of the film. Cinematic devices are inserted sporadically across the film, while some blends of filmic and theatrical devices are used more intensively in the middle-later parts of the film when the plot developments become relatively compact in comparison to the earlier parts of the film.

The fine-grained analysis of the complete film supports the contention that this framework has the potential to bridge the analytical gap reviewed in the

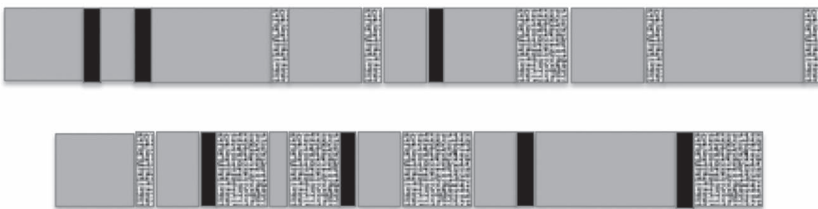


Figure 7.9 Deployment of the Three Main Types of Spatial Discourse Patterns in *THE ASSASSIN* (black patterns: typical cinematic spatial designs; grey patterns: theatrical-oriented space, textured patterns: blending of cinematic and theatrical devices)



beginning of this chapter. That is, not only can the systematic discourse analysis be applied to examine sequences throughout a film, but also, the phenomenon of transmediation and media blending is effectively revealed; the example analysis presented here shows that subtle blends of the devices under the two dominant trends can be, and should be, highlighted to elucidate the expressive cinematic tools used upon the theater-oriented long take sequence.

## 6 Conclusion

This chapter proposed a multimodal discourse approach to how the spectator's navigation is signaled in event space. A basic system network was formulated through integrating different analytical categories such as functions of plot space, on and off-screen space, and story space. This chapter also illustrated the instantiation of the system network and showed how the discourse analysis can effectively and systematically map out specific spatial patterns used as a film unfolds in time. For example, the analysis of *THE ASSASSIN* shows the substantial use of theater-oriented slow-moving patterns, whereas some typical cinematic tools are used when the rapid space and swift interaction of the typical *wuxia* genre is pursued.

Within performance studies, one potential contribution of this framework is to analytically distinguish mediated and live performance. This issue has been often debated (cf. Scheer and Klich 2011) particularly due to our omnipresent multimedia culture. A framework that is able to reveal the subtle differences of viewers' navigation and meaning interpretation processes between theater staging and filmed/edited performance will contribute to approaching these comparative issues of transmedial representation of performance. In particular, the analytical method proposed in this chapter is able to formulate more fine-grained but systematic meaning patterns for comparing how space constructions of performance filmed and edited for the viewers are similar and different from the spatial manipulation in theatrical stage used in cinema.

Within another theoretical context, on the basis of a problem-solving approach, David Bordwell (2005, 2007) has also extensively discussed distinctive functions and cognitive effects of editing-based and staging-based spatial configurations. The framework proposed in this chapter can be seen as supporting the problem-solving approach by its potential to constructing patterns for a systematic and comparative corpus analysis. This is precisely the direction that the further development of this framework should adapt to. The spatial discourse systems proposed in this chapter should be applied to compare the subtle relations and configurations of the elements in the two general trends in a broader corpus of *auteur* films, such as films of other masters of long take (e.g., Tarkovsky and Ozu) and of films adapted from theater plays to explore different degrees and deployments of transmedial features in cinema.

## Note

- 1 See the work by Bordwell (1981) for extensive analysis of Carl Dreyer's Kammer-spiel films.

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