

## ARTICLE

# The Construction and Exploration of Spatial Narrative under the Ken of Metaverse

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**Abstract:** With the continuous development and mutual construction of digital technology and the concept of the metaverse, the expression paradigm formed in the evolution of the metaverse will be established in continuous replacement. Based on current spatial construction process of metaverse, the characteristics and advantages of traditional spatial narrative will provide theoretical basis and basic rules for the construction of the metaverse expression paradigm. Simultaneously, the emergence of digital space will continually expand the concept of spatial narrative. This paper argues that the “great time” theory in spatial narrative will have positive effects in the spatial construction of metaverse and contribute to the expression of relevant rules of metaverse paradigm.

**Keywords:** Metaverse; Spatial narrative; Great time

## 1. Introduction

In 1992, Neal Stephenson firstly proposed the concept of “metaverse” in his novel *Snow Crash*. “Metaverse” is used to describe the panorama of the world in future cyberspace: people in different regions are immersed in virtual space through the ubiquitous Internet in the form of virtual avatar<sup>[1]</sup>. Spatial narrative originated from architecture. It is a theoretical perspective based on the intersection of linguistic, literature, semiotics and architecture. Nigel Coates, a representative of the narrative architecture school, once said, “Every culture expects architecture to carry continuous information and

exists as the bond of lives.” As a perspective, spatial narrative is also applied to film and television criticism in recent years. With the maturity of digital technology, spatial narrative has a possibility of virtualization under the ken of metaverse. However, the underlying logic of spatial narrative is still a symbolic narrative of real space. Therefore, not only has spatial narrative become the cornerstone of the continuous development of the concept of metaverse, but the development of metaverse reacts upon the new definition of spatial narrative.

## 2. Spatial Narrative under Digital Technology

With the introduction of “metaverse”, the possibility

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of “metaverse plus” has been widely explored on a wider scale. The maturity of digital technology makes the construction of digital space possible and promotes the emergence of digital narrative spaces. Digital narrative spaces will inherit the characteristics and advantages including multivocal, implicitness and immersion from the traditional one, and expand the interactivity and give narrative timely interaction. Furthermore, it will change connotation of “creation” of the spatial narrative in a broad sense.

There are two current trends from the perspective of the construction of digital narrative spaces. One is the enhancement of digitization of physical spatial narrative. The “cloud construction” of physical buildings and landscapes which completed through AR, VR and other technologies, is often based on temporary landscapes or festival scenes to achieve the effect of bottommost augmented reality. The interactivity and immersion are unsatisfactory and only used as eye-catching gimmicks within the limitations of current technology, which leads to the difficulties of maximizing the value of spatial narrative. The other is the new construction of digital space, mostly depends on the appeal of mature “IP” and based on large-scale social games or successful film and television works. Being regarded as the first attempt of “metaverse”, it could not fully achieve “digital double” in the “metaverse”<sup>[2]</sup>, but relying on a large and stable group of audience, the great fun of digital identity socialization in “metaverse” world has been shown. However, the construction of digital space, which relies on game platforms or film and television works, is largely counted on the imagination and act of players due to technical limitations. The construction of digital space is still simple, and the social networking is at the literal level, which is obviously different from the final “metaverse” vision.

Different from the construction of digital space, the exploration of digital narrative spaces is more surprising. Two extreme tendencies of creation that “instantaneous-eternal” are presented in digital narrative spaces according to the characteristics of digital space construction. Because of the inexpensive marginal cost of digital technology, producers do not need deliberateness in digital narrative spaces. It is only a presentation of an idea that form the final product by collectively working and constantly polishing in the community. The creation becomes a both short and long process. Producers create without conception and consideration of result owing to the lowcost, leading to the rapid and overturning change of spatial forms. To some extent, this kind of spatial narrative is often established to satisfy the desire of

creation. Production itself is consumed. Not all the results of creation are well-preserved, some even be destroyed after browsing<sup>[3]</sup>. On the contrary, driven by blockchain technology, every creation of digital space is completely recorded. Every deconstruction and recreation on the basis of mature narrative is downloaded and archived, presenting a totally different style from the meta-story and forming a new “scenic spot”. Digital narrative spaces becomes extensive in the broad sense and shows the amazing “folding” ability in space and time. Take Fuzhou’s Three Lanes and Seven Alleys as an example, we only need to install different ports in digital space, not only can we completely duplicate the real scene to satisfy players expectation for remote sightseeing, but also can just preserve the symbolic meaning of Three Lanes and Seven Alleys to achieve the digital deconstruction and present a completely different style from the real world whether it is street construction or cultural landscape.

### **3. The Debate with Reality and Fiction of Spatial Narrative**

In the traditional sense, spatial narrative should rely on the existence of real space. The sense of immersion in spatial aesthetic experience is irreplaceable. To some degree, it is because of the superiority of spatial narrative that the discussion between the reality and fiction is meaningful, and this gap is being eliminated by digital technology after being challenged by audio-visual art.

From the perspective of creation, digital technology has blurred the boundary between reality and fiction. Reality has become the rhetoric of fiction. As far as spatial narrative is concerned, architectural art and audio-visual art present two extremes of construction expression. The creation of architecture is completed based on the real world. Its materials and structures are real and reasonable, and the aesthetic expression of it is concrete and complete. Audio-visual art is the artistic reality from the beginning of text writing. The authenticity of film’s spatial narrative is a vivid imitation serve to the fiction, and the final form of creation is to be complete and multivoice. In the narrative of digital space, spatial construction can not only realize the “Mirrored Spaces Model” of the real world, but even show more details of the limits of human perception. The construction of digital space has completely abandoned the practical needs of architectural art, and the meaning of creation is only to be experienced. Both functionality and authenticity are carriers of expression, and aesthetic experience can be designed, guided and interacted with. From this point of view, the reality constructed in digital space is just a rhetorical way of fiction, the digital narrative spaces becomes the flower

of reality growing on the virtual soil.

From the perspective of acceptance, spatial narrative based on digital technology forms a paradox of reality and fiction. Andre Bazin, a pioneer of French films, once said, “Behind the art of cinema is the psychological desire of human beings to replace the external world with vivid replicas and the instinct to preserve life. This instinct is the desire of human beings to ‘preserve the truth’ and thus forms the ‘mummy complex’.”<sup>[4]</sup> With the maturity of digital technology, film critics no longer need to educate the audience about “artistic truth”, because the five senses have moved away from verisimilitude into real experience in the digital narrative spaces. Under the ken of metaverse, reality and fiction overlap in different dimensions, so the audience and players do not need to distinguish the so-called emotional reality. In the completely virtual digital space, all perception and experience realize the pure reality. Therefore, the emergence of digital technology not only puts forward a new topic of spatial narrative, but also challenges the traditional aesthetic paradigm subversively.

#### 4. Spatial Narrative under “Great Time”

Bakhtin pointed out in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* that what made Dostoyevsky a great artist was his discovery that “thought, consciousness, and all the lives of people illuminated by consciousness (lives that more or less related to thoughts) are dialogic in nature.” “The ability to create new meaning through dialogue is called ‘great time’. No connotation will be lost in dialogue, and the greatness of a work is revealed in the ‘great time’. The ‘dialogue’ effect is the cause and result of this ‘great time’.” Referring to the “dialogue” theory of Bakhtin, Professor Tian points out that the generation of “dialogue” field in films enables the protagonist, creator, even audience of different time and space to enter the “dialogue” field and resonate in polyphonic works until new connotations are generated. Because of the context of “dialogue” generated by the polyphonic structure, the old story becomes a brand-new one. The interlocutors from the unknown and new spacetime give the story a new possibility, so that the narrative of story will never vanish and always have a new connotation<sup>[5]</sup>. It is not difficult to find that the views of the two scholars are still of constructive significance in the discussion of digital narrative spaces. The theory of great time not only has guiding significance in the construction of digital space, but also opens up the infinite possibilities of spatial narrative under the ken of the metaverse.

From the theoretical perspective, the great time theory provides an instructive scheme for the construction of metaverse. The theoretical system of metaverse is not

perfect now, and the exploration of it is still “stumble”, so the discussion and expansion of the concept of metaverse mostly stays at the commercial level, and has an obvious trend towards the profit. There is a consensus in the academic circles that the logic of metaverse has existed in the practice of art appreciation for a long time though it is produced by digital technology<sup>[6]</sup>. That is, to construct the whole virtual fictitious world by fictionalizing the story through words. For example, the homage and imitation of classic works, the deconstruction and re-creation of classic characters; The “IP” operation in film and television creation, the universal concept formed after literary adaptation and comic revision. Therefore, it can be seen that in the long historical practice, the audience of the great time or the metaverse has already been complete<sup>[7]</sup>. Just as the discussion of metaverse starts from social platforms and games<sup>[8]</sup>, the authors’ idea is that spatial narrative provides a solid theoretical basis for the construction of metaverse, and the construction of the metaverse without the ability of spatial narrative will lose its core value and charm.

From the practical perspective, the metaverse expands the denotation and connotation of spatial narrative. Relying on digital technology, spatial narrative has ushered in an unprecedented change and iteration. Metaverse not only serves the social needs of human daily life, but also deeply participates in the activities of human art<sup>[9]</sup>. The artistic creation in metaverse will bring a brand-new aesthetic experience because of the different way to creation and appreciation. For example, not only will the film and television works in metaverse show more interaction and immersion, but also its experience traces in the process will become the experience text of the audience. It can even be said that every consumption of art works in metaverse will become a brand new production, and each creation stored separately by blockchain technology will release new connotation to the spatial narrative under the mechanism of great time<sup>[10]</sup>.

#### 5. Conclusions

The concept of metaverse has attracted worldwide unprecedented attention since its birth. There are many discussions in the academic circles, such as the surprise of revolution brought by technology and the surging business opportunities brought by the new production mode. It remains to be seen whether the development of metaverse will become a new media of human extension as Professor McLuhan said, which will not only wait for the progress of science and technology, but also undergo the test of the development of human society. With the surging between the logic of metaverse and the theory of great time, the

spatial narrative plays an increasingly prominent role in the construction of digital space, and the development and exploration of digital narrative spaces is also worth our continuous attention.

### Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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