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Imagining Structures, Negotiating Transitions: Body, State, and Meaning in a Shifting World

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The Heterotopia of Dance: Imagined Spaces in Dance Films

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Abstract

Dance films, as a cinematic genre that integrates bodily art with narrative expression, profoundly reflect the tension between social power, bodily discipline, and the expression of freedom through the dynamic construction of space. demonstrates discusses the characteristics and narrative functions of heterotopian spaces in dance films, revealing their representation and significance in the relationship between power and freedom. Adopting a qualitative analytical approach, the study uses Foucault's theory of "heterotopia" as its central framework and examines three classic dance films—The Red Shoes, La La Land, and Black Swan—across dimensions such as spatial characteristics, power and the body, and narrative function.The findings reveal that heterotopian spaces, through the interplay of virtual and real, reflect multifaceted considerations of artistic ideals, social discipline, and individual freedom in dance films.This study enriches the application of heterotopia theory in film studies, provides new perspectives on spatial design and narrative strategies in dance films, and further deepens the understanding of the relationship between art and socio-cultural structures.

Keywords: Heterotopia, Dance Film, Power and Freedom, Spatial Construction, Narrative Analysis

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1. Introduction

Film, as an integrated art form, is not only a combination of narrative and imagery but also an essential medium for expressing social, cultural, and philosophical reflections. Space is important in films. It is not just the background for the story. It also carries power dynamics, emotional tension, and imagination. Since the mid-20th century, Foucault's theory of "heterotopia" has provided a novel perspective for understanding cinematic space, particularly in how "other spaces" reflect and transcend reality (Johnson, 2006a; Leroy, 2016). Dance films, as a unique domain within cinematic art, are characterized by the high integration of body, movement, and music. This art form combines dance with cinematic narrative to create a novel visual experience, allowing audiences to perceive the fluidity of dance in space and the continuity of time. The spatial representation in dance films is not merely a reproduction of physical space but a profound embodiment of the concept of "heterotopia." Michel Foucault's theory of "heterotopia" emphasizes the heterogeneity and distinctiveness of space, qualities that are fully manifested in dance films (Delers, 2022; Zielinski, n.d.). Foucault argues that heterotopia is a special kind of space situated between reality and ideality, neither entirely real nor entirely ideal but existing uniquely in-between. In dance films, the construction of such spaces not only enriches the visual effects of the films but also offers new possibilities for the representation of dance (Cheema, n.d.; Francis, 2019). By intertwining virtual spaces and real stages, dance films transcend the boundaries of traditional narratives, presenting audiences with a space full of imagination and innovation. Whether it is The Red Shoes exploring artistic ideals or Black Swan depicting personal struggles, dance films showcase the power, aesthetics, and emotions of dancers' bodies through the interaction between dance movements and space. However, these films are not merely an extension of performing arts; they also delve into deeper social, cultural, and philosophical themes through the integration of dance and space in their narratives (Prasanth, 2023).

In recent years, scholars have increasingly focused on the narrative structures, bodily representations, and cultural significance in dance films. Some studies explore how dance, as an art form, shapes emotions or reflects social issues in films, while others analyze how dance represents power, freedom, and individual identity in cinema. However, most research focuses on the relationship between dance and narrative, with insufficient systematic exploration of the role of space in dance films, particularly the heterotopian qualities of intertwined virtual and real spaces (De Cauter, 2020a). Existing research tends to focus more on the visual and narrative functions of space while paying less attention to its significance from the perspectives of power and philosophy (Kuhn, 2004). In the field of dance films, there remains significant room to explore how space accommodates dancers' bodily performances and social metaphors, as well as how it reveals the tension between discipline and freedom. demonstrates Foucault's theory of "heterotopia" as its core framework, focusing on heterotopian spaces in dance films and

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examining how these spaces, through the interplay of virtual and real, represent the relationships between power, the body, and freedom. The goal of explore the characteristics and significance of heterotopian spaces in dance films, enriching the theory and practice in this field.The significance of this study is reflected in two aspects:

1. Theoretical significance: By combining Foucault's heterotopia theory with dance films, this paper explores how cinematic space represents power, the body, and social metaphors, providing a new perspective on cinematic space research while extending the applicability of Foucault's theory in arts studies.

2. Practical significance: This study offers unique references for spatial construction and narrative strategies to dance film creators, helping them better represent the interaction between dance and space.

The main contributions of this paper include:

1. demonstrates an analytical model of heterotopian spaces in dance films, revealing their dual functions in power relations and artistic expression.

2. Systematically explaining, through case analysis, how heterotopian spaces carry the social metaphors of dance, enriching the theoretical framework of the interplay between cinematic space and dance.

3. Proposing new strategies for spatial design in dance film creation, providing practical references.

Starting from Foucault's heterotopia theory and integrating the spatial characteristics of dance films, this paper explores how heterotopias, intertwined with the virtual and the real, express the tension between power and freedom.

2. Literature Review

The theory of heterotopia, proposed by French philosopher Michel Foucault, is an important concept used to describe a "space of otherness" or "spaces different from reality" (Johnson, 2006a). As research on film and dance art grows, heterotopia has become an important way to understand cinematic space and social power. Dance films, as a special type of film, still need more study about their stories, spaces, and power dynamics. This paper reviews the development and use of heterotopia theory and studies on dance films, pointing out gaps in research and showing the importance of this topic.

Foucault explained the idea of heterotopia in The Order of Things and his lecture Des espaces autres (1967). He said heterotopia represents "otherness" compared to regular social spaces, acting as a mirror or contrast to societal structures, power, and norms (Topinka, 2010). These spaces are both isolated and open, extending and going beyond normal social systems (Knight, 2017). Heterotopias have unique features, making them "spaces of otherness" that are tied to, yet distanced from, real society. They exist everywhere but take different forms and roles in various cultures. Examples include cemeteries or prisons, which are part of society but also somewhat separate (Boyer, 2008).Heterotopian spaces mix different times, creating experiences that go beyond linear time. For

instance, museums and libraries bring together past and present (Chaplin, 2000).These spaces can hold contradictory meanings. A ship, for example, represents freedom in motion but also symbolizes marginalization (Vizureanu, 2012). Heterotopias are linked to mainstream spaces but interact with them through rituals or rules, like religious sites or sanatoriums (Johnson, 2006a). As society changes, the roles of these spaces also shift. Prisons, for example, have changed from religious redemption centers to places of modern discipline (Saldhana, 2008). Heterotopias also highlight what is "abnormal" or "alternative," challenging mainstream norms while reflecting societal order (Knight, 2017). Foucault showed how heterotopias are both mirrors and critical expressions of social reality.Recently, heterotopia theory has been widely used in urban planning, architecture, film studies, and dance art. In film studies, it has been applied to analyze virtual spaces, time reconstruction, and how "spaces of otherness" show power dynamics. For example, in science fiction films like The Matrix, heterotopia helps explore how virtual spaces challenge social norms and power structures (Leroy, 2016). In the arts, the concept is used to examine how stage and performance spaces express creators' critiques of society and culture (Francis, 2019; Raidel, 2022).

Many researchers have focused on the narrative structures of dance films. Dance in films is not just a form of performing art. It also acts as a narrative tool. It can show character emotions without words, push the story forward, and even play a key role in shaping the film's main theme (Sánchez, 2020). Classic films such as The Red Shoes (1948) and Step Up (2006) have been extensively analyzed to explore how their dance scenes play critical roles in plot development (Francis, 2019). The bodily representation and power relations in dance films are also significant areas of research. Scholars argue that dance, as a highly embodied art form, serves as an important medium for power and cultural construction. In films like Black Swan (2010), the portrayal of the body reflects the societal pressures and discipline faced by dancers while also revealing the tension between individual resistance and self-redemption (Saarinen, 2016). Research also addresses the cross-cultural expressions and reflections of social issues in dance films. Some scholars have analyzed how dance films use various dance styles (such as ballet, street dance, and folk dance) to convey cultural diversity and social conflicts. For example, La La Land (2016) is regarded as a model for combining modern dance with jazz, where its spatial design and dance performance are seen as conveying themes of freedom and dreams (Balcom, 2012). Similarly, street dance-themed films such as Step Up 3D (2010) illustrate how subcultures use dance to challenge mainstream societal norms (Chung, 2012). However, despite the significant achievements in the study of narrative, body, and culture in dance films, systematic research on spatial expressions in dance films remains relatively scarce. Most studies focus on dance movements and character emotions, with less emphasis on how dance constructs power relations or transcends narrative boundaries through spatial design (Muñoz, 2020). In particular, the interplay of virtual and real spaces in dance films, with

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their heterotopian qualities, has yet to receive sufficient attention.

Dance, as a highly embodied art form, is not only a medium for emotional and aesthetic expression but also a significant arena for power dynamics and cultural discipline. Scholars widely believe that dance reflects the micro-dynamics of social power through the normalization and shaping of bodily movements (Green, 2003). Foucault's theory of power provides a critical framework for understanding this phenomenon, highlighting how power controls behavior and enforces self-discipline through the surveillance, examination, and regulation of individual bodies (Foster, 1996). The domain of dance training is often regarded as a disciplinary space. In this space, dancers' bodies are strictly standardized, with their movements, postures, and rhythms constrained by technical and artistic norms. Traditional dances such as ballet are often seen as exemplary instances of discipline due to their demands for high levels of bodily control and normalization (Clark & Markula, 2017) . In ballet training, dancers must not only engage in repetitive practice to meet technical standards but also internalize these standards to develop a "docile body" (Hargreaves & Vertinsky, 2007). Dance can also serve as a medium for resisting power and discipline. Improvisational dance and modern dance resist traditional dance norms and movement systems, exploring the diversity of bodily expression and thus demonstrating opposition to discipline. For example, the works of Martha Graham, the founder of modern dance, are characterized by deconstructing traditional dance vocabularies to convey individual freedom and emotion (Aalten, 1997). This practice of counter-discipline highlights the role of dance as a medium where power and freedom intertwine. The performance space of dance itself also participates in the construction and expression of power. The bodily performance on stage is both the result of dancers' internalized discipline and the externalization of societal power relations (Green, 2001).

Studies suggest that spatial elements such as stage design, lighting, and camera language further reinforce the power dynamics between dancers and audiences (Doria & Numer, 2022). In the dance film Black Swan, the dancer's pain and physical limits are amplified through contrasts within the stage space, reinforcing themes of discipline and bodily sacrifice (McNeil, 2002).

The theory of heterotopia provides an important theoretical foundation for studying virtual and real spaces in dance films. Although existing studies have yielded rich results in narrative, body, and culture, discussions on spatial representation, power dynamics, and heterotopian characteristics remain relatively scarce. In particular, the heterotopian spaces interweaving virtual and real in dance films, and how they construct dynamic fields to reveal the tension between power and freedom, remain areas worthy of deeper exploration. This paper will integrate Foucault's heterotopia theory to systematically analyze the spatial design in dance films from the perspective of the interplay between virtual and real spaces, revealing how the interaction between body and space deepens narrative and emotional expression, and offering new

directions for future studies on cinematic and artistic spaces.

3. Theoretical Framework

Michel Foucault introduced the concept of "heterotopia" in Des espaces autres (1967) to describe a "space of otherness" that is both connected to and transcendent of reality. Unlike utopias, which are idealized and unattainable imaginary spaces, heterotopias are real spaces that both reflect and critique social reality (Francis, 2019). Foucault identified six core characteristics of heterotopias: they are ubiquitous yet isolated from mainstream society, temporally heterogeneous, capable of accommodating opposing elements, simultaneously connected to and separate from society, subject to functional changes over time, and reflective of societal norms' deviations (Johnson, 2006a). Heterotopian spaces are not only reflections of social culture but also central arenas for the operation of power (Mancuso, 2016). The Panopticon, as a prototypical disciplinary space, enforces self-discipline through the "possibility of being observed" (Gibson, 2020). In recent years, heterotopia theory has been widely applied in the fields of art and film studies, particularly in science fiction, dance, and experimental films, where it is often embodied through the interweaving of virtual and real spaces (De Cauter, 2020a). In The Red Shoes, the interplay of stage and inner world represents artistic ideals and societal oppression, while The Matrix uses virtual reality to construct a metaphor for social order (Muñoz, 2020). This paper will incorporate Foucault's heterotopia theory to examine how heterotopian spaces in dance films depict the complex relationships between power, the body, and freedom (Christofidou & Milioni, 2023).

Foucault argued that power influences individual behavior and thought through meticulous disciplinary mechanisms (Mancuso, 2016). In dance training, dancers' bodies are placed in a "disciplinary space," where technical norms, standardized movements, and repetitive practice create a "docile body" (Muñoz, 2020). For example, ballet training demands that dancers strictly adhere to standards of posture, rhythm, and amplitude, with this internalized discipline further reinforced by mirrors, instructor supervision, and video recordings (Francis, 2019). Although disciplinary mechanisms are pervasive in dance, dance also offers possibilities for resisting discipline. Modern and improvisational dance reject traditional movement systems, emphasizing spontaneity and creativity, thus becoming bodily practices of counter-discipline (Johnson, 2006a). For instance, Martha Graham's modern dance deconstructs ballet conventions, emphasizing the expression of emotions and individual freedom (Christofidou & Milioni, 2023). This "counter-discipline" highlights the potential of the body as a medium where power and freedom intersect (Leroy, 2016). In dance films, bodily discipline and societal power relations are often reinforced through cinematography and spatial design. For example, in Black Swan, mirrors not only symbolize discipline but also reveal the complexities of dancers confronting

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physical limits and psychological pressures (Prasanth, 2023). The stages and virtual scenes in dance performances embody Foucault's concept of "spaces of otherness," serving both as sites of discipline and as mediums for transcending norms (Pitrolo & Zubak, 2022).

Dance films provide a unique perspective for analyzing virtual and real spaces, which are not only sites for narrative events but also dynamic arenas where power, the body, and freedom intersect (Francis, 2019). Heterotopian spaces, through the construction of stages, virtual scenes, and fantasy realms, transcend the limitations of reality, reflecting the heterogeneity, opposition, and transcendence of Foucault's heterotopia (Johnson, 2006a). In the stage of The Red Shoes, idealized scenes of artistic pursuit are depicted, while simultaneously symbolizing discipline and oppression in reality (Christofidou & Milioni, 2023). In La La Land, virtual dance scenes serve as symbols of dreams and freedom (Pina et al., 2024) . These spaces are not only venues for the presentation of dance but also cores for the operation of power and discipline. By amplifying bodily movements, intensifying emotional tension, and directing audience gazes, films demonstrate how power regulates and shapes dancers' bodies (Muñoz, 2020). In Black Swan, the combination of the stage and mirrors reinforces the metaphor of self-discipline and societal expectations while revealing the dancer's physical limits and psychological breakdown (Gibson, 2020). Although heterotopian spaces are rich in symbols of discipline, they also offer possibilities for counter-discipline and bodily liberation. Many dance films use virtual scenes and fantasy spaces to depict dancers' resistance to mainstream discipline. For example, the street dance scenes in Step Up challenge traditional aesthetic norms, showing personal resistance and creativity against cultural control (Mancuso, 2016). Heterotopian spaces redefine the body and freedom, becoming key areas where power and resistance meet. In dance films, these spaces not only move the story forward but also visually express characters' inner conflicts. The stage in The Red Shoes contrasts sharply with real life, representing artistic ambition while hinting at a tragic destiny. Through the design of heterotopian spaces, dance films combine narrative and visuals, adding depth to emotional and philosophical expression (Balcom, 2012).

4. Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research method, focusing on textual analysis and case studies, to explore the heterotopian features of virtual and real spaces in dance films. It examines how these spaces represent power, the body, and freedom through Foucault's heterotopia theory. The study analyzes heterotopian spaces in dance films by looking at cinematic spatial design, power symbols, and bodily representations. Three key dance films are selected for analysis: The Red Shoes (1948), Black Swan (2010), and La La Land (2016). These films showcase typical heterotopian spaces across different historical contexts and artistic styles, offering high research value. Data sources include film

texts (visual imagery, narrative structures, set designs, and dance performances), director interview videos, and film reviews, supplemented by academic literature to provide theoretical support for the analysis.

The research primarily examines film visuals, cinematography, dance movements, and spatial design to interpret how heterotopian spaces are constructed and their impact on the representation of dance. The research process is divided into three stages: the first stage identifies research objects and collects film texts and related literature; the second stage analyzes the types and functions of heterotopian spaces in films based on Foucault's heterotopia theory; and the third stage synthesizes the results to uncover the unique significance of heterotopian spaces in dance films. This study aims to systematically analyze the construction of heterotopian spaces in dance films and their representations of power and freedom, offering a new theoretical perspective for film and spatial studies.

This paper addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the structures and characteristics of heterotopian spaces in dance films?

2. How do these spaces express the tension between discipline and freedom through dance?

3. How do heterotopian spaces drive narrative development and convey emotional and philosophical meanings?

The analytical model of heterotopian spaces in dance films is presented in the structure shown in Figure 1:

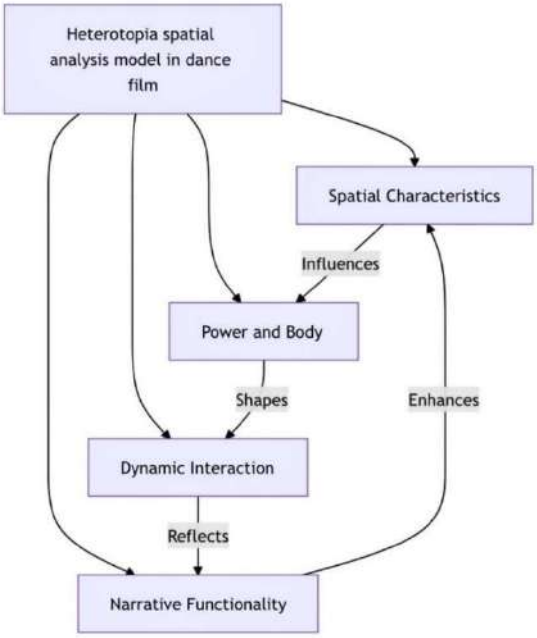


Figure 1: analytical model

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5. Case Analysis

Case 1: The Fantastical Stage in The Red Shoes

The Red Shoes (1948) is a classic dance film whose core narrative revolves around the struggles of young ballerina Victoria between her artistic aspirations and personal life. In the film, the stage is not only a venue for the dancer to showcase her artistic ideals but also a quintessential representation of heterotopian space. Through the intertwining of fantasy and reality, the stage constructs a multidimensional space that embodies the complex relationships of power, freedom, and personal destiny.

The analysis based on the "heterotopian space analytical model" proceeds as follows across four dimensions: Spatial Characteristics Dimension: The stage in The Red Shoes, with its surreal set design and dynamic lighting, reflects the temporal and spatial heterogeneity of Foucault's heterotopia. In the "Red Shoes Ballet" segment, the stage transcends physical boundaries, with set transitions between reality and fantasy showcasing Victoria's inner emotions and artistic aspirations. The audience is pulled into a world that is both real and fantastical, where the overlap of time and space reflects the character's artistic dreams. This also highlights the heterotopia's ability to connect different times and spaces. The stage, as a heterotopian space, holds opposing elements: it symbolizes Victoria's pursuit of freedom and dreams while also being a place of discipline and control. On stage, Victoria's movements are strictly controlled, showing disciplinary power. At the same time, the stage offers her a space to express individuality and emotion, revealing the complex roles of heterotopian spaces. Power and Body Dimension: The stage in The Red Shoes is not just a place for artistic performance; it is also a metaphor for societal power structures. Boris Lermontov, the ballet director and a figure of authority, shapes Victoria's "docile body" through strict training, choreography, and rules.His control extends to every detail of the stage, making the dancer's body a visible representation of power. However, this discipline is not one-sided. Victoria's emotional investment and self-expression in her performances show resistance to and transcendence of this power. For example, in the "Red Shoes Ballet" sequence, her relentless pursuit of artistic ideals through her movements surpasses Lermontov's disciplinary boundaries. This resistance highlights the stage as a heterotopian space where freedom and opposition to power coexist. Narrative Function Dimension: The heterotopian space in The Red Shoes is not just a visual setting but also a key driver of the story. The "Red Shoes Ballet" sequence merges fantasy and reality through camera techniques and set transitions, externalizing Victoria's inner struggles. The red shoes, as a symbol of her artistic ambitions, lead her toward her dreams while hinting at her tragic fate. The stage's shifting dynamics propel the narrative. For example, in the ballet sequence, the stage amplifies Victoria's emotional conflicts through fantastical visuals, clearly showing the clash between her artistic dreams and reality. Ultimately, the stage symbolizes her fate, as she

collapses under the tension between heterotopia and real life. Dynamic Interaction Dimension: The interaction between the stage, characters, narrative, and audience is a defining feature of the heterotopian space in The Red Shoes. The fantastical design of the stage reflects the tension between Victoria and power while allowing the audience to deeply experience her emotions and struggles through the interplay of reality and fantasy. For instance, in the "Red Shoes Ballet" sequence, the dancer's movements on stage symbolize the battle between discipline and freedom, while the audience feels this tension through dynamic camera transitions. This blend of real and fantastical spatial design enhances narrative immersion and emphasizes the stage as a heterotopian space, encouraging reflections on the conflict between art and reality.

Case 2: The Temporary Heterotopia in La La Land

La La Land (2016) combines romanticism with musical elements, using a distinctive narrative style and visual approach to create "dream dance" spaces as temporary heterotopias where fantasy and reality merge. These spaces go beyond the limits of the real world, offering unique environments for characters to express their dreams and freedom, reflecting Foucault's key features of heterotopia.

Spatial Characteristics Dimension: In La La Land, "dream dance" spaces demonstrate the uniqueness of heterotopia through their blending of time and space. For example, the "Planetarium Dance" scene uses surreal set designs and dynamic lighting to create a world where characters escape reality and pursue freedom. In this scene, Mia and Sebastian's gravity-defying dance through the cosmos represents limitless possibilities of time and space. This fusion of reality and fantasy blurs their boundaries, embodying heterotopia's connection to and transcendence of the real world. The temporary nature of "dream dance" spaces is evident in their brief suspension of real-world rules. For instance, the opening highway dance sequence creates a fleeting space of freedom with sunlight, energetic dance movements, and a sense of dynamic flow. Here, dancers defy traffic rules and everyday behavior, symbolizing a momentary escape from real-world discipline. Power and Body Dimension: While "dream dance" spaces in La La Land express freedom and dreams, their temporary nature reflects the underlying presence of discipline and the characters' inability to fully break away from reality. The characters' bodies balance between freedom and control. In the "Planetarium Dance," for example, Mia and Sebastian's spinning and floating movements momentarily defy physical and societal rules. However, each "dream dance" ends, bringing them back to the constraints of everyday life. This tension is particularly visible in the "Imagined Future" dance sequence near the film's conclusion. In this sequence, Sebastian envisions a perfect world where love and career coexist seamlessly. Yet this utopian fantasy is shattered by reality, highlighting how discipline ultimately shapes their lives and decisions. Narrative Function Dimension: The "dream dance" spaces in La La Land are not just visual

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highlights but essential tools for advancing the story. These heterotopian scenes externalize the characters' emotions and conflicts, offering the audience deeper insights into their journeys. For instance, the first dance between Mia and Sebastian, set against a sunset backdrop with a stage-like design, creates a temporary heterotopia. This space captures the transition from their initial meeting to the beginning of their emotional connection. The brief dance not only expresses the start of their relationship but also hints at the challenges and complexities they will face in the future. The "Imagined Future" dance at the end uses virtual space to show the characters' ideal lives that were never realized. This intensifies the emotional conflict and adds philosophical depth to the story. When the dance ends, both the audience and the characters return to reality. This narrative design not only brings the story to its climax but also encourages reflection on the tension between dreams and reality.Dynamic Interaction Dimension: The "dream dance" spaces in La La Land create an immersive experience by blending reality and fantasy. This interplay closely connects the characters, the narrative, and the audience.

In the "Planetarium Dance" sequence, virtual space combines visual effects with bodily movements to convey the boundless possibilities of dreams, while the audience experiences the emotional fluctuations of the characters' dream pursuits through the interplay of fantasy and reality. This dynamic interaction is further elevated in the "Imagined Future" sequence. Sebastian's memories and fantasies are portrayed through the combination of dance and space, drawing the audience into the utopian fantasy while highlighting its fleeting and unattainable nature. The film offers a deep philosophical reflection on freedom and discipline through the temporary and fluid nature of heterotopian spaces.

Case 3: The Distorted Heterotopia in Black Swan

Directed by Darren Aronofsky, Black Swan (2010) creates a tension-filled, distorted heterotopia through its cinematography, spatial design, and psychological depth. Focusing on the body and mind of the dancer Nina, the film uses heterotopian spaces to examine the intricate relationship between the oppression of discipline and the fleeting nature of freedom.

Spatial Characteristics Dimension: The heterotopian spaces in Black Swan combine Foucault's concepts of temporal and spatial heterogeneity. These spaces are grounded in reality yet transcend it through visual and narrative design, providing a reflection of Nina's inner turmoil. As the center of discipline, the rehearsal room is where Nina's body is shaped into a "docile body" under Thomas's strict guidance. Its cold, enclosed design amplifies the oppressive sense of power and control, symbolizing the standardization of bodily techniques. Acting as an extension of the heterotopian space, the mirror reflects the physical standardization imposed by discipline while visualizing Nina's internal struggles. Initially, the mirror offers precise reflections, but as the story progresses, these reflections distort,

symbolizing the erosion of Nina's mental health under the weight of discipline. The ultimate representation of heterotopia, the stage merges the results of discipline with the potential for transcendence. During the climactic moments, the interplay of lighting, music, and choreography transforms the stage into a space where reality and fantasy intertwine, showcasing Nina's "perfect" performance at the edge of discipline and freedom. Power and Body Dimension: Black Swan explores how disciplinary power deeply impacts the dancer's body and psyche. Nina's body becomes the target of this power, with the mirror intensifying her internalization of discipline. Thomas exerts control over Nina through psychological pressure, physical interactions, and verbal suggestions, pushing her to exceed her technical and emotional limits. The mirror becomes a constant reminder of discipline, forcing Nina to judge and critique herself against strict standards. However, as her mental state deteriorates, the mirror's reflections become distorted, symbolizing the invasion of discipline into her inner freedom. The "other side" of the mirror represents Nina's inner conflict and her suppressed desire to escape. In her climactic "Black Swan" performance, Nina briefly transcends discipline through her movements on stage. Her transformation is visually represented by feathers growing from her back, symbolizing her body breaking free from its constraints, even if only temporarily. Narrative Function Dimension: The heterotopian spaces in Black Swan are essential for both advancing the narrative and deepening Nina's emotional and psychological struggles. The rehearsal room and mirror dominate the early parts of the film, emphasizing how Nina's body and mind are shaped and controlled by disciplinary power. The mirror and stage externalize Nina's obsession with "perfection" and her self-destructive conflicts. For instance, the distorted mirror reflections represent her fear of failure and loss of control, while the surreal sequences on stage express her yearning for liberation.Through these spaces, the film visualizes Nina's internal journey, blending the real and the fantastical to highlight her struggle between discipline, freedom, and the pursuit of perfection.

The heterotopian space of the stage heightens the film's emotional intensity, culminating in the climactic "Black Swan" performance. In this moment, Nina attains perfection on stage, embodying a fleeting sense of freedom. However, this achievement comes at the expense of her mental and physical collapse. Ultimately, the stage serves as a powerful symbol of her tragic fate. Dynamic Interaction Dimension: The heterotopian spaces in Black Swan create dynamic interactions among characters, narrative, and audience through the interplay of reality, fantasy, and visual effects. Cinematography and visual effects allow the audience to experience Nina's psychological changes between virtual and real realms. For example, the distorted mirror reflections and hallucinations of feather growth illustrate the dynamic tension between discipline and liberation. Nina's interactions with the rehearsal room, mirror, and stage portray her entire struggle within the confines of discipline. The mirror intensifies her self-surveillance over her body, while the stage becomes a symbolic vessel for her fleeting freedom. Through the multifaceted interactive design of heterotopian spaces,

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the film allows the audience to deeply feel the dancer's struggle between power and freedom, sparking philosophical reflection on the "perfection" of art and its real-world cost.

6. Discussion

Dance-centered films have increasingly garnered attention in academia, particularly regarding the unique role of spatial expression in dance films. Foucault's theory of "heterotopia" provides an essential perspective for understanding the spatial characteristics in dance films, particularly in expressing the interplay of power, the body, and freedom within the intersection of virtual and real spaces. However, existing studies primarily focus on narrative and bodily representation, with relatively limited exploration of the heterotopian qualities of space and their social metaphors.

The findings of this study align with existing literature while offering complementary insights and expansions. Previous research has addressed the narrative functions and representations of power in dance film spaces. For example, Francis (2019) and Sánchez (2020) argue that dance is not only a vital tool for nonverbal storytelling but also expresses personal emotions and social conflicts through the interaction of space and the body. These views align with this study's analysis of heterotopian spaces, particularly in Black Swan, where dance spaces are sites for disciplining the body, resonating with Foster's (1996) concept of "disciplinary power in dance training."Additionally, prior research highlights mirrors and stages as central spaces in dance films, symbolizing the tension between dancers' internal emotions and external norms. For instance, McNeil (2002), in her analysis of Black Swan, emphasizes that mirrors function as tools for dancers to monitor their bodies and as symbols of psychological pressure and disciplinary power. This study extends this perspective by interpreting mirrors as heterotopian spaces that transition from standardized reflection to chaotic distortion, a shift that deeply aligns with the heterotopian nature of mirrors and Foucault's theory of power. While the narrative function of spaces in dance films has been mentioned in existing literature, few studies systematically analyze the multidimensional representation of power and freedom in spaces where virtual and real intertwine, from a heterotopian perspective. Through an in-depth analysis of The Red Shoes, La La Land, and Black Swan, this study reveals how heterotopian spaces integrate critiques of reality with reflections on artistic aspirations within temporal and spatial heterogeneity, echoing Johnson's (2006b) ideas on "heterotopias reflecting tensions between reality and ideality." Existing research often focuses on the oppressive effects of power norms on dancers' bodies in dance films, such as Clark and Markula's (2017) analysis of the "docile body" phenomenon in ballet training. However, this study goes further by using the heterotopian framework to reveal how dancers deconstruct power through bodily performance.In The Red Shoes, the stage acts as both a site of power and a space for freedom, illustrating the potential for resistance and expanding the discourse on "power and counter-power" in existing literature (Leroy, 2016).

Foucault's heterotopia theory has been extensively applied in fields such as architecture, urban planning, and cultural studies, but its application in dance films remains underexplored (De Cauter, 2020b; Leroy, 2016). Unlike previous research, which predominantly examines the functional aspects of visual spatial design, this study introduces a systematic analytical model to explore how heterotopian spaces in dance films create dynamic interactions between the virtual and the real, enhancing narrative and philosophical depth. This approach provides fresh perspectives on the study of "dance and power" and extends the applicability of heterotopia theory within the arts (Delers, 2022). Existing research on cultural expression in dance films often focuses on how dance styles reflect societal structures and cultural tensions. For instance, Chung (2012) highlights how street dance films like Step Up embody subcultural resistance to mainstream norms by breaking traditional dance conventions. This aligns with this study's exploration of the "dream dance" spaces in La La Land, demonstrating that heterotopian spaces can not only express personal emotions and aspirations but also symbolize cultural resistance and social disparities. Kuhn (2004) argues that the heterogeneity of cinematic spaces emerges from the blending of past and future and the tension between reality and fantasy. This study builds on Kuhn's analysis by showing, through case studies, how this heterogeneity is realized in dynamic spaces within dance films, offering a deeper understanding of their narrative and symbolic functions. For example, the "Starry Dance" scene in La La Land uses virtualized visual design to blur the boundaries of time and space, drawing the audience into a dream space that transcends the constraints of reality, affirming the "temporal diversity" and "opposition" of heterotopian spaces (Johnson, 2006a; Vidler et al., 2014). Green (2003), in studying the relationship between dance and social power, suggests that dance, as a social metaphor, is both a means of normalizing the body and an important form of resistance to power.

These spaces not only highlight the intricate relationship between power and freedom in artistic creation but also encourage audiences to critically reflect on social norms and cultural order through visually driven narratives. For filmmakers, the heterotopian space analytical framework introduced in this study provides valuable guidance for the spatial design of dance films. By focusing on the interplay between virtual and real spaces, creators can more effectively convey artistic themes and emotional complexity. Moreover, this study offers fresh perspectives for dance educators and cultural policymakers, emphasizing the need to balance power norms with individual freedom in dance education and creative practices. Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. It focuses on three classic dance films, which may not fully capture the heterotopian characteristics of dance films across diverse cultural contexts. Future research could explore a broader range of films to enrich the understanding of heterotopian spaces in global dance cinema. Second, the audience experience of heterotopian spaces has not been fully explored, which may limit the comprehensive

understanding of their narrative function.

Future research could expand upon the findings of this study in the following ways: First, investigate the characteristics of heterotopian spaces in dance films from diverse cultural contexts to reveal the impact of cultural differences on spatial design; Second, incorporate audience perspectives to examine how heterotopian spaces influence viewing experiences through visual and emotional interactions; Third, apply broader multimodal analytical methods to further explore the narrative potential of heterotopian spaces in dance films.

7. Conclusion

This study adopts Foucault's theory of "heterotopia" as its central framework to systematically investigate the heterotopian spaces interweaving virtual and real in dance films, revealing their pivotal role in the dynamic relationships between power, the body, and freedom. Through case analyses of three representative dance films—The Red Shoes, La La Land, and Black Swan—this study examines heterotopian spaces across four dimensions: spatial characteristics, power and the body, narrative function, and dynamic interaction, elucidating their construction logic and profound implications. The study reveals that heterotopian spaces are not only artistic carriers of visual and narrative interaction but also fields of tension between societal power mechanisms and individual expressions of freedom. Specifically, the stage in The Red Shoes embodies a dual symbolism of artistic aspiration and disciplinary power; the fantastical dance spaces in La La Land express the tension between ideals and reality through fleeting moments of freedom; and Black Swan uses mirrors and the stage to construct a heterotopian space full of conflict and oppression, deeply exposing the impact of disciplinary power on the body and psyche.

The theoretical contributions of this study are mainly reflected in three aspects: First, it extends the application of Foucault's heterotopia theory in film studies, particularly regarding the relationship between the spatial construction of dance films and social metaphors, offering a new academic perspective. Second, by constructing an analytical model for heterotopian spaces, it deepens the theoretical understanding of the relationships among dance, power, the body, and freedom. Third, it provides dance film creators with new references for spatial design and narrative strategies, highlighting the potential of interwoven virtual and real spaces in artistic expression. This study complements theoretical and practical explorations of heterotopian spaces in dance films. These spaces not only reveal the dynamic tension between power and freedom but also, through multifaceted narrative and visual interactions, deepen the understanding of the relationship between artistic creation and socio-cultural order, opening new avenues for further research and practice in related fields.

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