

Panel 23
Film and Intermedial Encounters

**Desire and Horror in *The Prestige*:
Intermedial Misdirection in Film, Magic, and Letters**

Kelvin Ke Jinde

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

This paper examines the intermedial intersections of literature, cinema, and stage magic in Christopher Nolan's adaptation of *The Prestige*, originally a novel by Christopher Priest. Using Roland Barthes' five narrative codes, this analysis explores how desire, as expressed through the pursuit of knowledge, intimacy, and artistic mastery, produces horror via epistemic disorientation and narrative misdirection.

Focusing on the epistolary structure of the original text and its cinematic reworking, the paper examines how unreliable narration is heightened through filmic techniques such as sound bridges, rapid editing, and non-linear chronology and storytelling. These techniques, parallel the misdirection central to both stage magic and the act of storytelling, constructs a meta-commentary on the ethics of spectatorship. The film's tripartite layering of media in terms of letter-writing, performance magic, and cinema suggests fertile ground for intermedial analysis. It particularly draws attention to the scopophilic and voyeuristic tendencies of the viewer/reader and implicates them in the unfolding horror, especially in the revelation at the end that reveals the cost of human suffering for the sake of entertainment. By theorizing *The Prestige* as an intermedial narrative, this paper contributes to contemporary debates on narrative ethics, media hybridity, and the aesthetic configuration of desire in postmodern storytelling. It further argues that Nolan's adaptation critiques the very mechanisms of its own medium, thus framing both art and spectatorship as ethically charged acts of concealment and revelation. Finally, it also critiques the horror of desire.

Biography

Kelvin Ke Jinde is a media scholar and practitioner based at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University. His research spans film studies, narrative theory, and digital storytelling, with a focus on intermediality and cultural memory. His creative and academic work explore how cinema and literature negotiate identity, ethics, and spectatorship across cultural contexts.