

**Liminality and Transgression:
Spatial Analysis of Identity Formation in
“The Little Mermaid”**

Liang Chen

Associate professor, Fudan University

Abstract

From the perspective of spatial theory, the present paper aims to analyze the construction of self in “The Little Mermaid.” The three spaces of the sea, land and sky are filled with intersections of liminal spaces and active efforts of transgression, which shapes the little mermaid’s self in the dynamic process. The body of the little mermaid, as the center of space power construction, not only reveals the mechanism of power control during spatial transformation, but also highlights her spiritual transcendence during her decoding efforts. In this process, community does not play the decisive role in the shaping of self for the little mermaid, rather, the self is shaped during her confrontation against community from the margin.

Introduction

In the depiction of the fairy tale world, Hans Christian Andersen has shown strong preference in spatial construction, which has created a dynamic arena for him to exhibit his notion of identity. The space created by Andersen is not a complete and self-sufficient entity, but a place which is filled with intersections of liminal spaces and active efforts of transgression. The liminal space constructs a symbolic realm of values, meanings, and forces, a realm which witnesses the growth of the self as the counterpart of community. The liminal condition symbolically generates those essential individual features in the self that transcend the communal structures in the fairy tales. In this sense,

it can be said that the notion of liminality in Andersen's fairytales expresses his concern with identity construction and self-evaluation.

Among his fairy tales, "The Little Mermaid" has been widely popular for the rich artistic and humanistic beauty of the heroine, the little mermaid. The symbol of the mermaid remains an essentially unwaver mythological, intrapsychic, and cultural figure precisely because she carries complex symbolic meaning of the self embedded in Andersen's mind. Yet, questions still remain as to the specific mechanism of liminal conditions in the shaping of the self and the functions of transgression involved.

The paper will apply Lefebvre's theory of social space, especially his triad mode, in the textual analysis of "The Little Mermaid," examining the three spatial qualities in the three spaces of sea, land and sky respectively to examine the production and representation of space in the fairytale. By so doing, the present paper aims to investigate the spatial structure as a whole community and mechanism of liminality within the text to examine Andersen's efforts of self-construction. To further analyze the power mechanism and identity formation in the three spaces, the paper will apply two other theoretical terms of "transgression" and "liminality" in the analysis of the fairy tale. It may uncover the power system in the text, which, combined with the ideological transformation of the little mermaid, helps to reveal Andersenian style of identity formation.

The Sea Space: body as representation of female spatiality

Theoretically speaking, space has become an indispensable perspective to uncover the rich connotations in textuality, combining both cultural geology and postmodern cultural theories which have shifted the academic attention from temporality to spatiality. It has endowed space with independent subjectivity and equal status with time. Also, spatial theory highlights the complexity of various elements inside space, which in turn exhibits the rich mechanism of the operation of space. This theory updates the traditional time-based perspective into a trinity notion which combines space, time and existence. In Anglo-American social science, particularly since the 1991 translation

of *The Production of Space* (originally published in 1974), Lefebvre has probably been best known for his pioneering contributions to sociospatial theory. His theory of social space provides a conceptual framework through which the spatial practices of everyday life can be understood in the context of the social production of spaces. According to Lefebvre, social space is a social product (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 27). He recognizes space as a location as well as a metaphorical and social phenomenon. To capture the production of space, Lefebvre constructs a spatial triad, an epistemology to understand this production and its outcomes and unites these three spatial dimensions: representation of spaces, spatial practice and spaces of representation. His aim was not “to produce a (or the) discourse on space, but rather to expose the actual production of space by bringing the various kinds of space and the modalities of their generation together” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 16). The act of producing space is recognized as fundamental in daily spatial experience. After all, “we are, and always have been, intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities. Perhaps more than ever before, a strategic awareness of this collectively created spatiality and its social consequences has become a vital part of making both theoretical and practical sense of our contemporary life-worlds at all scales, from the most intimate to the most global” (Soja, 1996, p. 1). What Lefebvre has highlighted is the organic connection of dynamic dimensions in spatial construction. Thus “in Lefebvre’s hands, space becomes re-described not as a dead, inert thing or object, but as organic and fluid and alive; it has a pulse, it palpitates, it flows and collides with other spaces. And these interpenetrations – many with different temporalities – get superimposed upon one another to create a present space” (Merrifield, 2000, p. 171). When being applied in literary analysis, his triad mode may better reveal the narrative strategy, themantic connotation and other textualities in the text.

In “The Little Mermaid,” space is not only a specific material framework which constitutes the place where meaning takes shape and plot develops, but also embodies organic connections to the character’s spirituality, plot development and symbolic

interpretation, etc. Specifically, the three spaces in “The Little Mermaid” not only constitute the existential location for the characters, but also reveal different subjectivities in respective space-layers. The construction of the outer space usually corresponds to the little mermaid’s physical transformation and inner emotional changes. The process of the spatial ascendance of the little mermaid from the bottom space of the sea to the top space of the sky is also the process of her spiritual purification and identity confirmation.

Examined from a spatial perspective, the trialectics of spatiality fits well into the three spaces: the sea, the land and the sky in “The Little Mermaid,” whose spatial mechanism is rich and dynamic. To begin with, the notion of representation of space is the dominant space in current society and is the conceptualized space constructed out of symbols and abstract representations. It is the symbolic dimension of space, referring to the images and symbols used in the space to signify meaning. As outlined by Lefebvre, “this is space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols... space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects... tend towards more or less coherent systems of nonverbal symbols and signs.” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). These representations are the “logic and forms of knowledge, and the ideological content of codes, theories, and the conceptual depictions of space” (Shields, 1999, p. 163), and can be regarded as symbolic construction of spaces. It is an abstract representation, which has arisen through the proliferation of symbol systems providing categories and forms of analysis.

Viewed from this perspective, the first space of the sea in “The Little Mermaid” has very obvious features of being a symbolic construction, characterized by the symbols of power in spatial coding and body representation. Andersen has decorated it with many power signifiers to use material symbols to represent the coding mechanism in the female power structure, highlighting the materialistic nature of this female space.

In the textual description, the sea space is peculiarly exotic in terms of its marine features. “The most marvellous trees and flowers grow down there, with such pliant stalks and leaves that the least stir in the water makes them move about as though they

were alive.” (Andersen, 2004, p. 67). While in the depiction of the space there, the peculiar marine scene is not a simple exotic setting in the text; rather, it symbolizes the power mechanism in the vast marine space. The objects in the marine space are utilized to systematically exhibit the operation and controlling mechanism of the power system in the sea.

Also, Andersen endows the spatial power with gender characteristics and, thus, gender power has become an important part of the spatial mechanism in “The Little Mermaid,” and plays an essential role in shaping the selfhood of the little mermaid. In the sea space, most of the inhabitants are female. Besides, the figure who has the ultimate control over the sea space is the mother of the Sea King. The only male in the space is the Sea King, a subordinate who is speechless all the time. It can be safely concluded that the first sea space is a powerful female space which exerts control over the individual spaces and body constraints.

This control takes effect on all the mermaids who are confined in the power system, which is also represented in a symbolic manner. The supervision extends from the management of their bodies to the manipulation over their own spaces and consciousness of identity confirmation. The mermaids do not have names and are mentioned only numerically. “Each of the young princesses had a little plot of ground in the garden, where she might dig and plant as she pleased” (Andersen, 2004, p. 68). Although they have their own spaces, the spaces, as part of the whole marine space, have to be in line with its supervision, which helps to regulate the consciousness of identity confirmation of the mermaids.

The method works well. All the mermaids obey the order of the time to rise to the surface. Except for the little mermaid, all the other sisters decorate their own spaces which are in line with the marine features. The material decorations clearly show their obedience to the manipulation over the subject by the spatial power system. “One arranged her flower-bed into the form of a whale; another thought it better to make hers like the figure of a little mermaid” (Andersen, 2004, p. 68). Yet, different from other sisters, the little mermaid longs for the scene above the sea. Her desire is so strong that

she removes the marine-featured decorations favoured by the other sisters from her space and chooses decorations which are characterized by the space of the sky. “She cared for nothing but her pretty red flowers, like the sun, excepting a beautiful marble statue. It was the representation of a handsome boy, carved out of pure white stone, which had fallen to the bottom of the sea from a wreck” (Andersen, 2004, p. 68).

As a symbol of the self, the garden can be regarded as the Pure Land and Western Paradise that reflect an idealized inner space of potential wholeness and hidden design. Utilizing the symbols of the garden, the red weeping willow tree, and the marble statue of the man, Andersen’s tale suggests that wholeness may be attained by tending to the lost feminine principle and by redeeming the soul, which, in the little mermaid’s situation, is personified by the internal masculine principle and is represented by the statue. Therefore, the little mermaid’s attraction to the prince is an unconscious means by which the internal feminine principle seeks totality. She falls in love with her own internal image, the masculine image of her soul, which has been projected onto the prince and symbolizes the driving force promoting her transgression from the first space to the second one.

The materialistic feature of power mechanism in space can be further analyzed through the connection between physical features and spatial transformation. In this sense, body has also been treated as a symbol in Andersen’s representation of marine space. In the depiction of the inner environment of the sea space, the objective materials, including bodies, symbolize the coding mechanism and individual status in power structure.

One of the spatial features in “The Little Mermaid” is the dynamic spatial changes, which keep changing with the plot development. The transformation of the space can be best represented by the physical transformation. In “The Little Mermaid,” direct connection between the body and space can be easily found, and, what is more important, the transformation of space is well accompanied by the transformation of body shape. In spatial theory, the body constitutes the center of the space. The change of space is not objective, geological, architectural in its nature, but a change which

involves the transformation of its focus and center: the body. “The change of the body is the one of space and vice versa” (Xie, 2010, p. 67). In the text, the transforming body has become a metaphor for the maturing awareness of selfhood for the little mermaid, both foregrounding the nature of the spaces she is in and exhibiting her female consciousness.

In the marine space, body, being spatially coded, is the primary target to be under control in the space. The manipulation of the subject usually starts with the control and shaping of the body. In the beginning of the story, the mother of the Sea King is portrayed as “a very wise woman, and exceedingly proud of her high birth; on that account she wore twelve oysters on her tail; while others, also of high rank, were only allowed to wear six” (Andersen, 2004, p. 67). As the decoration in the marine space, the twelve oysters not only add charm and beauty to the old mother, but also symbolically exhibit and reinforce her status in the space. Similar material coding functions of the marine decoration can also be found on the body of the little mermaid. On the day when the little mermaid is going to rise to the ocean surface, “she (the grandmother) placed a wreath of white lilies in her hair, and every flower leaf was half a pearl. Then the old lady ordered eight great oysters to attach themselves to the tail of the princess to show her high rank” (Andersen, 2004, p. 71). Compared with other mermaids, the additional two oysters have the similar function of status exhibition and reinforcement in the power hierarchy. On the one hand, they are the symbols of the grandmother’s affection to the little mermaid, while on the other hand, they contain a disciplinary force which binds and regulates the little mermaid and leaves her no choice but to obey. From the analysis above, it is safe to say that as the symbol of power control and management, the body vividly exhibits the operative mechanism of power taking effect in space. The process of power manipulation over the little mermaid also shows her gradually mature and independent spirit.

Body, as the key symbol in the three spaces, participated in the transgressive act between the spaces. According to Sollers, transgression does not only operate on the language level, but also through the core element of body, “This language of

transgression is a language of the opening of limits, including the limits of language itself. It is also a language in which '[t]his opening is achieved not abstractly, but through the body' (Sollers, 1998, p. 85).

Yet, the act of transgression has dualistic effect. According to Bataille, "At all costs we need to transcend [limits], but we should like to transcend them and maintain them simultaneously" (Bataille, 1986, p. 141). Transgression, in Bataille's words, is "limited" because it is not a violence which would destroy closure. "It is rather a violence that exceeds closure while paradoxically remaining trapped within its limit. Transgression is the 'complement' of closure, and not its destruction. This is because the limit is not an entity whose mode of being would be transgression's 'other'. On the contrary, the modality 'excess within containment' defines *both* these concepts" (Libertson, 1977, p. 1013). Transgression thus heightens or creates an awareness of the law. As Bataille writes: "If we observe the taboo, if we submit to it, we are no longer conscious of it. But in the act of violating it we feel the anguish of mind without which the taboo could not exist. . . That experience leads to the completed transgression which, in maintaining the prohibition, maintains it in order to benefit by it" (Bataille, 1986, p. 38).

The taboo set in the sea space can be regarded as a co-relational device to connect the sea and land spaces and reinforces the existence of both of them. The transgressive experience is thus organized and produced by the imposition of a limit always existing in relation to it, even and especially at the moment of its rupture. The sensation of transgression is conditioned by a cognizance of the taboo and is, as a result, fundamentally "duplicitous," performing "a reconciliation of what seems impossible to reconcile, respect for the law and violation of the law..." (Bataille, 1986, p. 36). In the fairytale, the little mermaid's physical change, basically speaking, is to meet the male standard of beauty, and her female beauty remains as an object under gaze by the prince in the male-dominated land space. Hence, the transgression of the little mermaid does not challenge or overthrow the taboo in effect, rather it heightens or creates an awareness of it. As Bataille commented: "If we observe the taboo, if we submit to it,

we are no longer conscious of it. But in the act of violating it we feel the anguish of mind without which the taboo could not exist. That experience leads to the completed transgression which, in maintaining the prohibition, maintains it in order to benefit by it” (Bataille, 1986, p. 38, 42). The transgression, thus, only leads to the reinforcement of the male power in the land space.

Viewed from above, it can be concluded that both the sea and land spaces are characterized by their strong force of closure. Her transgressive act to pursue self only bring punishment by the sea space and marginalization by the land space. In this sense, transgression itself is not only a spatial action, but also an existential one for the little mermaid to dynamically redefine herself.

The Land Space: spatial practice of male power

The second space of the land is a typical male-chauvinistic one, which is shown through the depiction of the prince’s palace,

It was built of bright yellow shining stone, with long flights of marble steps, one of which reached quite down to the sea. Splendid gilded cupolas rose over the roof, and between the pillars that surrounded the whole building stood life-like statues of marble. Through the clear crystal of the lofty windows could be seen noble rooms, with costly silk curtains and hangings of tapestry; while the walls were covered with beautiful paintings which were a pleasure to look at (Andersen, 2004, p. 75).

The grand construction of the palace is similar to the one of the Sea King. As a spatial symbol, it shows the controlling power of the prince over the land. If we examine the land space more closely, we will find that, compared with the symbolic nature of the sea space, the land space is more of a practiced one, i.e., besides the spatial symbols representing power control, Andersen highlights the practice of male power in the land space.

The second element in Lefebvre’s triad mode is spatial practices, which

“embrace(s) production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33) and as such comes together with other triadic elements to ensure the levels of cohesion and competence required for the everyday functions of society, the spatial events of life. This “cohesion through space implies, in connection with social practice and the relating of individuals to that space, a certain level of spatial ‘competence’ and a distinct type of ‘spatial performance’ by individuals” (Shields, 1999, p. 162).

While the first space of the sea is more tolerant, the second space, as a male space, is more antagonistic to the little mermaid, characterized by rich male spatial practices which lead to the marginalization of the little mermaid. Correspondingly, the practice of power control is more active. It is in the masculine land space that the little mermaid has realized her feminine consciousness being treated as the Other and it is also in this space that the little mermaid begins to reshape her understanding of the feminine identity and role in the masculine world.

Compared with the first space constituted by symbols, the second space is mainly constructed by the performances of the prince which keep reinforcing his control over the space. After entering the second space, the little mermaid is kept in the margin in the male-dominated space. “She was very soon arrayed in costly robes of silk and muslin, and was the most beautiful creature in the palace; but she was dumb, and could neither speak nor sing” (Andersen, 2004, p. 81). Symbolically speaking, the beauty of the little mermaid has turned her into an alienated being which is under observation and is unable to remain equal in status with the prince. The loss of voice is peculiarly symbolic of her absence of subjectivity and female consciousness.

As far as her status is concerned, she is placed among the slaves and tries to please the prince while accompanying him or dancing for him with the slaves.

The slaves next performed some pretty fairy-like dances, to the sound of beautiful music. Then the little mermaid raised her lovely white arms, stood on the tips of her toes, and glided over the floor, and danced as no one yet had been able to dance. At

each moment her beauty became more revealed, and her expressive eyes appealed more directly to the heart than the songs of the slaves (Andersen, 2004, p. 81).

In this scene, the little mermaid is placed in the same space as the slaves and her rich affection and female consciousness are suppressed. Her existence is subordinate to the prince's male consciousness and gradually drifts away from the female independent subjectivity.

At the same time, as the male governor of the land space, the prince is not consciously aware that the little mermaid should be equal with him in status. Examined from the perspective of space, the spatial management of the prince over the little mermaid is characterized by his male hegemony. After the little mermaid arrives at the palace, "The prince said she should remain with him always, and she received permission to sleep at his door, on a velvet cushion" (Andersen, 2004, p. 81). Spatially speaking, the place where the little mermaid sleeps is the margin of the prince's, which clearly shows the status difference of the two characters created by the prince. After losing her voice, the little mermaid tries to communicate with him through eye contact and her dance, yet, he fails to understand her efforts. The lack of effective communication of love leads to the prince's ignorance of the deep affection of the little mermaid and turns to love for another princess, which directly leads to the tragedy of the little mermaid. On the surface level, it seems that the tragedy arises out of her lack of voice and inability to express herself. While on the deep level, the failure of spiritual communication between them is due to the male hegemonic ideology held by the prince and the unequal status between them.

Gradually, the plot comes to a critical point when the little mermaid is asked to kill the prince to return to the first space. Traditionally speaking, the suggestion of killing the prince arises out of the traditional dichotomous gender notion, which is characterized by the early feminist theory of struggling against a patriarchal system. Yet, what the little mermaid did transcends the traditional feminists, as it discards the dichotomous view and replaces it with tolerance and self-sacrifice. It is an effort as a

direct destruction of the discontinuous spaces and her isolation. By sacrificing herself instead of killing the prince, the little mermaid symbolically kills the projection she has had on the prince.

Similar to the first effort, the little mermaid actively makes her move. The choice is also a practice the little mermaid has actively made to construct a space of her own, a space free from the control of the previous two spaces. It is this virtue which empowers the little mermaid and paves the way for her spiritual purification. In the second spatial transformation from the sea to the sky, the little mermaid has turned her action from transgression into transcendence when she has sacrificed her life, which has turned itself as a sacred ritual, liberating the little mermaid from the dichotomous mode of gender spaces and constructing her liminal space in the sky.

The Sky Space: liminality as space of representation

The third element of the triad, space of representation is the space of lived experience, it is the space “as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). As such it is the space that overlays physical space as it is lived in the everyday course of life. It is the space of representation that forms and facilitates the deviations, diversity and individuality.

In terms of the feminine identity in the fairytale, it is not well-nurtured and fully grown in the previous two spaces. Then, the third space of the sky created by the little mermaid herself can be regarded as the one which nurtures independence and individuality of her female consciousness. In this sense, the sky space can be viewed as a liminal one which is characterized by the little mermaid’s undifferentiated creative energy and evolutionary potential, which is not fixed in closure. It forms an essential stage in the little mermaid’s selfhood development.

Liminality is a limbo period characterized by ambiguity, humility, seclusion, tests, and sexual uncertainty, which are in accordance with the open and uncertain state in the sky space. And, “Liminal entities often form *communitas*, an unstructured community where all members have equal status. In the third and final phase,

reaggregation, the passage is completed, and the individual, who finds relative stability again, has rights to exercise and duties to fulfil. These become clear-cut and "structural," and one is expected to behave in accord with the customs and moral norms that bind all persons in a society or cultural group” (Voitkovska, 2007, p. 84).

A social structure of *communitas* is based on common humanity and equality rather than hierarchy. During the liminal stage, differences between participants that are normally observed, such as class, are often ignored or de-emphasized. Making a transition between states in the society that is “structured, differentiated, and often [based upon a] hierarchical system of politico legal-economic positions with many types of evaluations, separating men in terms of ‘more’ or ‘less,’” is defined by Turner as “an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders” (Turner, 1969, p. 96). As “secular distinctions of rank and status disappear or are homogenized, among themselves, neophytes tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism” (Turner, 1969, p. 95). While we examine the notion of community in the three spaces, we can find that if we regard the two communities in the sea and land spaces as structured and organized ones, functioning effectively in their gender power. The sky space is quite open and egalitarian, loose in communal structure, which is in line with the liminal feature of *communitas*. If we regard the sea and land spaces as communities, we may find that community does not play the decisive role in the shaping of self for the little mermaid, rather, the self is shaped during her confrontation against community from the margin, which constitutes Andersen’s notion of the little mermaid’s self, and possibly, the self of his own.

Turner further describes three transitional phases of liminality: separation, margin, and aggregation. In the first, the individual is detached from a "group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'), or from both." In the next phase, one "passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state." Turner suggests that liminal

entities are "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner, 1969, pp. 94-95).

Thus liminality is that moment "when the past has lost its grip and the future has not yet taken definite shape" (Turner, 1992, p. 133). While it may be a moment of restlessness, unleashed by an unknowable future, it certainly is also site of empowerment revealed in the possibilities for dissonance and dissidence. In other words, liminality in "The Little Mermaid" represents Andersen's notion of dynamic nature of identity characterized by its inherent contradictions and instabilities.

The liminality in the sky space makes fluid the arbitrary boundaries fixed in closures between the previous two spaces. The little mermaid is placed outside the power systems in the previous spaces and free from the frustration engendered by the limitations of structured life. By achieving the existential state unattainable in structured roles, the limitations in the previous closures are broken. The transgression over rule-governed power realm releases the little mermaid's inner desire to pursue self. Being an air spirit with an ethereal body (and no tail), the little mermaid finds herself among the clouds and earns for herself the capacity for an eternal identity. The liminality there is loaded with ambiguity; it represents the little mermaid's rejection of structures and hegemonies and secures her own space where she may generate the meaning of that particular space and of her own identity. Entailing confusion and paradox, the liminality points up the immense freedoms which come about when contradictions are synthesized and overrun in the sky space.

At the same time, liminal space is critical for empowerment and resistance, as liminality allows her to occupy two different worlds, creating a "Third Space". While we examine the body feature of the little mermaid in the sky space, the disappearance of her physical shape is a breakaway from the previous identity defining standards and social boundaries. The uncertainty of physical feature and ambiguity in the final space aims to highlight her free mind and self-sufficiency in her female consciousness. "The Little Mermaid" distinguishes itself by this unique female liminal space where the little mermaid eventually obtains independent and intact female subjectivity. In this liminal

space, she is not only an entity existing in space, but also a self-sufficient spatial unit. The self-sacrifice in the transcendence is morally respectful and she has become more independent and mature free from gender control. The self-sufficiency of her subjectivity paves the way for her transcendence, which is different from the previous transgression since the former is a breakthrough from the two closures while the latter reinforces them instead.

Conclusion

The story, in its most basic form, illustrates the process of the little mermaid's maturation in her searching for selfhood. Andersen clearly wants the mermaid to gain a soul by her own efforts instead of relying on someone else to bestow a soul upon her. Andersen wrote to a friend in 1837: "I have not . . . allowed the mermaid's acquiring of an immortal soul to depend upon an alien creature, upon the love of a human being.... I have permitted my mermaid to follow a more natural, more divine path" (Andersen, 1980, pp. 250-251). By creating the three spaces, Andersen has built up the form of spatial discontinuity in the text. Yet, the transgression can be regarded as an act transcending discontinuity and maintaining the unity of self in the discontinuous form. For Andersen, the little mermaid's identity to self is shaped in a dynamic process, which combines objective and subjective, concrete and abstract, tangible and intangible, physical and spiritual factors in its deconstruction as well as reconstruction of the first and second spaces.

Lefebvre has distinguished space itself from spatiality and widens the geological spatial imagination and recognizes the complexity of spatial problems by introducing sociality into the study of space. For him, space is not only materialistic spatial practice, which can be standardized or labelled; also, space is not only a pure ideological sphere, a conceptualized representation of signals. It is the interplay of the three dimensions that make up social space and they are not separate spaces but parts of a unity.

Similarly, the third space of the sky constructed by Andersen highlights the unified feature of spatiality, combining the features of the symbolic world of the sea and the

practiced world of the land. In “The Little Mermaid,” the three layers of space have constituted a complex web. The narration about the little mermaid in each layer is closely connected to the other two layers. This unity helps to shape the liminality in the sky space, making it into the most peculiar and distinctive one as the space of representation. “This distinctiveness is achieved in conjunction with, while not being completely constrained by, the strictures of the representations of space and the spatial practices that have developed to provide the necessary cohesion and competence for successful social interaction” (Watkins, 2005, p. 213). Through combination, the third space overthrows the definition of traditional gender ideology on the female body, transcends the dichotomous spaces constraining the little mermaid, who has greatly substantiated the third space with female consciousness and enriched the text with much vitality. From the perspective of space, readers can not only observe the body transformation during the transcendence from the sea, land and sky spaces, but also witness the mechanism of power control over the individual in the space and the efforts made by the little mermaid to fight against it. Thus, the key of esthetic apprehension of the story does not lie in the transgression from the sea space to the land space, but in the transcendence of the land space to the sky space. This breakthrough is not only a revolt against body confinement, but also spiritual sublimation and purification of the female consciousness represented by the little mermaid.

Thus, the fairy tales told by Andersen are not only a transcendental representation of reality, what’s more important, with its rich textual mechanism, it has turned itself into an open and dynamic space, an Andersenian “literary field”, where active intertextuality has greatly enriched and empowered the characterization of the heroine and plot shaping, thus bringing novel reading experience to the readers.

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