

Aesthetic study of short online videos from the perspective of visual culture

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Abstract. With the development of film and television technology and the rapid spread of mobile Internet technology, visual images have widely penetrated into people's life world, becoming the richest resource of daily life in our time, an inescapable symbol and a "main cause" of culture. In this paper, we take the most widespread and influential online short video in the new era as an example, and explore its aesthetic characteristics in three aspects: mechanical reproduction, gender gaze and ostentatious visual consumption.

Keywords: visual culture, visual consumption, short video.

1. Introduction

The formation of visual culture is closely related to the specific contemporary developments of post-modern culture, consumer society and media culture. As Mirzoeff points out, the so-called visual culture is in fact the everyday life in post-modern culture, and visual forms, as the main form of expressive output, have become the normalised environment that wraps the lives of the masses, and visual media have taken over the space of individuals' daily lives. Due to the interaction between internet technology support and visual culture, and the fact that short and quick information dissemination has become the mainstream of this era, short videos are rapidly becoming popular in the field of visual culture. People are strongly attached to this visual environment and increasingly value visual aesthetics and are keen on visual experiences. ^[1]With the proliferation of users on short video platforms, the creative works of short videos reflect the aesthetic interests of the public and shape people's aesthetic preferences.

2. Mechanical Reproduction

In his book *Artworks in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin points out that with the advent of photography and film technology, mass reproduction of art became possible, and that 'technological reproduction can take a copy of an original work to a level that the original itself cannot reach', leading to a 'great upheaval' of tradition. "This led to a 'great upheaval' of tradition, and at the heart of this 'great upheaval' was the decline or loss of the 'spirituality' of traditional art. Benjamin points out that these works of art were originally unique beings, dedicated to a specific time, space and tradition (churches, chapels, religious ceremonies, etc.), and that these traditions gave the work of art a special and original meaning, i.e. the originality of the work of art. However, contemporary reproduction techniques (photographs, films, audio, video and CDs, etc.) have taken the work of art out of its tradition, leading to a decline or loss of the spirituality of the work, that is, of the unique meaning of the work of art.

Benjamin analyses the reasons why mechanical reproduction has become an important trend in contemporary culture. One is the profound changes in image production brought about by the development of science and technology in modern society, especially photography, which is obvious. On the other hand, technical reproduction also comes from the modern masses and their psychological motivations. Benjamin says: "The modern public has a strong desire to make things more 'approachable', just as they have a strong tendency to overcome their uniqueness by making a copy of every physical object. This desire to possess an object by possessing a cool resemblance, a copy, or possessing a replica of it is increasing day by day." It could be argued that the mass psychology of

proximity to the object or possession of the model led the public to stop seeking the so-called 'spiritual charm' of artistic originality, which in turn led to a strong demand for reproduction and thus images, which flourished by virtue of technology.

And in short video platforms, mechanical copies of works like this are commonplace. As long as one makes it to the popular short videos, similar short videos will soon appear one after another. For example, drag blogger He Dantong quickly became popular after he took the lead in releasing a drag video of a wind bell scepter on the TikTok platform, and many bloggers soon followed suit, using the same background music, clothing style, mirroring techniques and even some bloggers went to the same locations for filming, making a time when most of the videos on the TikTok. The majority of videos on the platform revolved around the wind chime scepter cross-dressing, and there was even a challenge to the hotlist. Short videos like this are mechanically copied, losing the original's charm and initial beauty, and will soon wear out the audience's sense of freshness, making them feel aesthetically tired, thus forming a vicious aesthetic cycle.

As Benjamin says, people's desire to look alike has led to a frenzy of imitation of popular products. For example, Li Ziqi, a country life blogger who is well versed in all 18 kinds of gardening skills, has created a video of about ten minutes with almost no verbal expressions, which, through the mesmerising beauty of the countryside and a scene rich in life, as well as the visual and aural scenes of a girl in homemade traditional costumes making food, weaving and cultivating, and being self-sufficient, paints a picture for the audience of a simple Chinese countryside far from the hustle and bustle of the city. The visual and aural scenes of a girl in traditional costume making food, weaving and cultivating, and self-sufficiency paint a picture of a simple Chinese village life away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Seeing Li Ziqi's success, many people saw this style of short video creation as a business opportunity or a shortcut to popularity and copied it. For example, the blogger "Niu Aifang's Little Spring Flower", who has a persona of a poor farmer in the countryside, posted short videos of her daily life in the countryside, cooking and doing farm work, whether it was the house she lived in, the dress she wore, or the cooking process, all of which were very grounded, without any filters. But the good times didn't last long, soon the netizen couple was blinded by the benefits, earlier Niu Aifang promised fans never to bring goods, but was soon smacked in the face, the couple began to sell goods live, but also due to quality problems and prices on the expensive side by netizens accusations. Not only that, netizens also picked up on the fact that the Niu Aifang couple was acting the whole time, there was a team behind the video packaging, actors were grouped, crops were bought, and what's more, according to the official news report, they had their own company and villa under their name, which was really a shocker. The content of their videos, on the contrary, reveals awkward smiles and unkempt gestures, which not only fail to reflect the simplicity of being a farmer, but also scandalise the image of farmers, and even deliberately scandalise themselves in order to gain the attention of the audience, inadvertently becoming a "laughing stock" for people. "laughing stock". The actions of the Niu Aifang couple not only deceive the audience, making the image of the farmer no longer pristine, but at the same time leaving the audience's aesthetic sensibilities in shock.

3. Gender Gazing

The concept of the gender gaze originated in John Berger's *The Way of Seeing*, in which he analyses the female gaze and the male gaze. Berg points out that women have a double gaze, one as the observer who considers the inner and the self, that is, their own observation and gaze on themselves, and the other as the observed, that is, the male observation and gaze on women. But Berg points out that for women, the self-gaze is actually also about impressing men or attracting the external male gaze. The inequality in gaze between men and women can be seen in this perspective. According to Berg, men observe women, while women are concerned with how they are observed, and this determines most relationships between men and women. By analysing some of the nude portraits, Berg states that "the way women are depicted is very different from the way men are

depicted, not because of a difference in temperament between men and women, but because the 'ideal' viewer is usually a man, while the image of a woman is used to please a man."

Another thinker on visual culture from a gendered dimension is Laura Mulvey. She explores the gendered dimension of visual pleasure that arises when watching mainstream Hollywood feature films from a psychoanalytic perspective. She suggests that the two forms of visual pleasure that constitute narrative cinema are voyeurism and identification. "Voyeurism", i.e. the viewing of another person as an object of sexual stimulation and the pleasure derived from it. "Identification", on the other hand, refers to the breaking down of the boundaries between self and film, where the viewer seems to become part of the film and thus derives pleasure. For the actors who appear on television, they are the most frequently watched objects in everyday life. The actor's 'being seen' is first and foremost a product for the visual consumption of others. As actors, they must not only be good performers, but they must also use their superior conditions to satisfy the viewer's voyeurism, with their beautiful faces, proud bodies and sweet smiles. There is a direct interaction between people watching each other in everyday life. This interaction prevents the viewer from becoming an object of surveillance. It is worth noting that the viewing environment created by media such as film, television and the internet does not have this direct interaction. This looking and being looked at creates an unequal relationship, making the viewer of the recorded images a voyeur, in an active and dominant position, and the viewed in a silent and passive one.

In recent times, a style of video has emerged on the Jitterbug short video platform, mainly referring to some female netizens wearing semi-revealing clothing, doing some tongue out, crotch twisting and other dance videos containing sexually suggestive movements, ostensibly "pure lust style", but in fact it is a kind of female self-gaze, in order to attract male external gaze. In fact, it is a kind of female self-gaze, which is done in order to attract the external gaze of men. For example, in order to attract the attention of male audiences, some female netizens wear non-traditional cheongsam in their videos, but the cheongsam is the traditional dress of Chinese and Chinese women around the world, and is regarded as the national treasure of China and the national costume of women, not only that, but also in some sense it symbolises women's rights. The cheongsam has the grace of an oriental beauty, the dignity and elegance of an elegant woman on the water side, and the trendy style of a fashionable beauty, no matter which style it is, the cheongsam is an elegant dress for all seasons, but in these netizens it has become unsightly, the video content is emitting unpleasant soft pornography, turning the original elegance and dignity of the cheongsam into vulgar and ugly crotch twisting, not only insulting the cheongsam but also spreading bad. The video not only insults the cheongsam, but also spreads bad taste and creates a perverse aesthetic among the audience. There are even winners who use such "erotic" videos as a flow code to become a top-flowing internet celebrity. For example, netizen Ichikuri Xiaoshazi was not very popular when she first joined Jitterbug, but after she posted a dance video on her short video account wearing a sexy blue knitted dress that showed off her figure, she exploded all over the internet, gaining nearly three million likes and skyrocketing millions of fans, and was dubbed by netizens as the "blue-clad god of war. The video was called "The God of War in Blue" by netizens. Since then, netizen blogger Yuri Xiaoshazi has mastered the flow code of "pure desire and sexy" dressing style, giving full play to the contrast between her innocent looks and voluptuous figure, becoming a top flow blogger on short video platforms. The increasing prevalence of such short videos on the internet has made the aesthetic of the audience even more perverse.

At the same time, there is another kind of "male" consumption on the Jitterbug platform that is the exact opposite of women as objects of gaze: men have become, to some extent, the objects of women's gaze and consumption. As the status of women in modern society continues to rise, a new consumer market for women has emerged, making men the objects of observation, with more and more men becoming concerned with women's perceptions of their bodies, their looks and their clothing. These men are known as urban beauty men, and they are generally seen as subverting traditional ideas and expectations of what a man should be. The importance they place on their appearance and enjoyment of life is reflected in their daily lives, such as going to beauty salons, gyms and being concerned with fashion maintenance. The most prominent features of these men are their delicate and beautiful faces,

long and slender bodies and flirtatious and seductive demeanour. However, in short video platforms, some male bloggers use their bodies as consumer products to gain the attention of female audiences. For example, the lightsaber drag videos, which originally focused on drag and made the style of the videos more cool through the rendering of lights, gradually evolved into a home for men to show off their abs and bodies, reducing the supposedly rich meaning of the body to naked physical flirtation, teasing and attraction, although partially achieving. Although this has partially increased the value of attention, it has also seriously damaged the ecological environment of cyberspace and become a representative of vulgarity.

4. Conspicuous Consumption

As a matter of fact, with the continuous development of modern industry, when the production of commodities became extremely abundant or even excessive to varying degrees, the value composition of material products underwent a fundamental change: the use value of commodities became increasingly diluted and the cultural value became increasingly prominent, with people paying more attention to the cultural significance of commodities than to their practicality. This change has led to consumption becoming a social and cultural form, i.e. what people consume is not exclusively material, but may also include other things that come with the material or are attached to it, such as brand, status, position, etc. For example, wearing clothes to keep warm does not necessarily have to be called consumption, but wearing a certain brand of clothing to show one's status or position is consumption in the full sense of the word. This is the fundamental meaning of the word 'consumption' in a consumer society. One of the most important manifestations of this consumption is visual consumption, i.e. people often realise their consumption behaviour through visual activities. For example, the use of designer bags, watches, cars, expensive food, and so on, is clearly a better expression of status or interest than other forms of expression and has a stronger sensory impact. For Van Buren, such consumption is a form of conspicuous consumption.

The concept of "conspicuous consumption" was introduced by Van Buren in his "Treatise on the Leisure Class". Conspicuous consumption is a type of social behaviour in which the consumer's economic power, social status or political power is made known to others through consumption, thereby gaining honour and self-satisfaction. For example, giving expensive gifts to others, driving a luxury car, hosting extravagant parties, etc. These are all attempts to prove one's wealth, status, identity or power. Even in the lower economic classes, the fact that one of the spouses stays at home and does not work in the market to earn money is evidence of conspicuous consumption. According to Van Buren, there are two forms of conspicuous consumption: direct consumption by the person himself or herself and "proxy consumption", which is a way of showing one's financial status from a side perspective through the special consumption of someone with whom one has a close relationship. For example, the pet blogger "Ah Hua Fosters Cats" released a series of works on the theme of a leopard cat of more than 100,000 yuan that her aunt had fostered in her house, gaining more than three million followers. The blogger's videos reflect her level of wealth by feeding her cat expensive ingredients such as king crab and sashimi, and travelling in luxury cars. There are also many short videos of netizens claiming to be celebrity girls, posting short videos of them staying in fancy suites, going to and from high-end clubs, wearing clothes that cost over \$10,000 and spending wildly with their hands, painting a picture of pomp and extravagance for the audience, prompting people to pursue novelty, desire action, crave sensation and satisfy their desires from visual images. To a certain extent, this kind of ostentatious consumption will affect the audience's aesthetic and consumer outlook, making them blindly follow the trend and even consume items beyond their means just to satisfy their vanity like some netizens.

5. Concluding Remarks

In such an era of proliferation of visual culture, the phenomenon of aesthetic generalisation among the public is becoming more and more serious. Some short video content, in order to stimulate the public's desire, excessively pursues visual pleasure, making the creation of short videos into a misunderstanding, while also making the public's aesthetic vulgar. Therefore, as the creators of short videos should actively promote positive mainstream values, they should meet the aesthetic expectations of the audience as far as possible, while reflecting the connotation and values of short videos, so that the audience can truly realise the dual experience of visual aesthetics and spiritual aesthetics in the process of watching, and not sell their bodies, play ugly or show off their wealth without any bottom line in order to gain the attention of the audience, by satisfying their curiosity and voyeurism. It is undesirable that the traffic obtained by satisfying the curiosity and voyeurism of the audience is detrimental to the interests of netizens. At the same time, the visual culture suitable for dissemination should be guided by a tiered and consultative governance model, which should provide a relaxed environment for the expression of content and emotions of the general public and everyday; for videos with individuality but with some undesirable tendencies, restrictions should be strengthened to guide, identify the problems and upgrade the level; for elegant ones in line with the national image and civilisation, active support and vigorous promotion are needed. [2] For the audience to improve their aesthetic sentiment, not for a moment of visual pleasure and addicted to it, but also need to act as a supervisor of short videos that do not meet the moral norms or even violate the legal standards to be reported, together to maintain a good network environment.

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