

Broken Aesthetics: Wasteland Film

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ABSTRACT

Aesthetics is a process of discovering one's main coordinate in roaming [1]. It is proposed that the concept of *broken aesthetics* is derived from the inspiration vaguely generated under the combined forces of professional knowledge, aesthetic experience, and critical consciousness in the daily massive movie-watching process. Broken aesthetics is the abstraction and sublimation of alternative aesthetic consciousness in the film, showing another kind of extreme beauty. It belongs to the beauty based on the imagination of life, which is metaphorical and requires an aesthetic imagination.

The concept of *waste land* originated from the public's concern about nuclear war after world war II. However, it was not until the birth and popularity of the eponymy video game in the last century that the term waste land became popular and developed into *wasteland film* by combining it with B-Sci-fi. Taking wasteland films as an example, this paper expands the meaning of broken beauty, which is missing in film aesthetic culture, and gives poetry and connotation with the help of the appearance of brokenness...

Keywords: *Broken aesthetics, apocalyptic, wasteland film, doomsday complex, ruins*

1. INTRODUCTION

To be or not to be is an enduring theme in human history. Whether it is literature or video, religion or science, there seems to be an endless creative urge on this subject.

In the history of mankind, there are many works of art that depict the end times. The eschaton complex of human beings has a long history. From the Gospel of Matthew in the bible to the present, this plot is pervasive in the long artistic creation, which constitutes the cultural psychology of human society. The high development of civilization and the problems exposed by human society also strengthen this kind of emotion to some extent.

The doomsday complex is the ultimate reflection on social development, human and nature under the extreme circumstances of the natural environment. Artists also use this kind of emotion to depict the landscape in the end of the world and examine the living conditions of human beings. As a result, the doomsday complex naturally extends to the modern art of film.

Human's infinite imagination of the doomsday is rooted in human's fear of death and desire for survival. On this basis, two kinds of films are derived: one is disaster film and the other is wasteland film. The former focuses on why the world is destroyed, while the latter, which has a deeper core, focuses more on the discussion of surviving civilization and human nature after the disaster as well as the spiritual state of human beings after the huge disaster..

In such films, what is associated with the future is not the expected beauty, but the decay, the decline, and the killing. However, in such a completely decayed world, in the face of death and ugly, human beings can erupt out of unimaginable power. Therefore, it is a kind of apocalyptic mood with hope and grand description, and it contains the cold and hard power, which is the residual ideal in the hearts of human beings.

From the aesthetic point of view, the works with the doomsday as the background, present a kind of ruins aesthetics. Perhaps some people will wonder, what is the beauty of ruins? In *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) someone asked Lawrence, "what is it about the desert that appeals to you?" Lawrence succinctly replied, "it's clean!" This is the charm of wasteland: blank, primitive. Human beings are born with a "frontier" impulse, and human civilization is also in this spirit along the way. The end, in effect, is when humans hit the reset button on themselves. Everything is eliminated and starts all over again. The wilder the world is, the more hopeful it will be [2].

Often, we are moved by the beautiful and gorgeous images in the film, but often in the end, we will find that beauty is often illusory, but broken is true, and this is our dilemma. Of course, everyone perceives what is beauty differently. In the movies, these beauties are all equal, and there is no such thing as good or bad. After all, beauty is a feeling of being moved. Beauty provides us with an emotional outlet when we become indifferent to everything. The sense of brokenness reflected in the wasteland film is also a necessary

expression of the atmosphere of the doomsday and this broken beauty is the aesthetic redefined by the film [2].

In a larger sense, broken aesthetics can be a kind of Times aesthetics, which is the result of the spread of subculture to mainstream culture and can also reflect the changes of people's minds in The Times. To be small, broken beauty can also be a kind of alternative temperament.

This research on "broken aesthetics" not only focuses on film culture and film aesthetics, but also on the current situation of the whole society and culture. For this reason, the author tries to make a phenomenological analysis of the broken beauty constructed from films, to spread the film aesthetics, and to discuss the definition of such films containing broken beauty, so as to further extend and develop the research space of film art aesthetics.

2. THE HOPELESS OF THE END-TIME

Back in the days of the Greco-Roman empire, all three tendencies in worldview philosophy answered the same question: how can individuals live meaningfully in a meaningless world? This question has haunted philosophers and poets from thousands of years ago even till today. The two world wars and the two atomic bombs dropped by the United States in Japan have awakened mankind to the fact that the end of the world is not far away. Thus, the fear of the end of the industrial age has spread. All in a sudden, human beings have lost all the values. In a hurry, they begin to re-find values, and recall their faith and God. The search for meaning in meaninglessness suddenly becomes a reason for existence.

Throughout history, the origin and several important developments of waste land films are all closely related to financial crisis, war, and social change. In 1968, a movie called Planet of the Apes was released to arouse a lot of applause. This is the first film to involve the concept of "wasteland". The idea is quite close to the later wasteland films, and the whole worldview structure has the blunt force of the heart feeling. The film was adapted from a novel of the same name by French writer Pierre Boulle, a spaceship from the 20th century travels at the speed of light for nearly six months before crashing to earth in 3978 AD. By this time, human beings had already fallen in the process of greed and mutual killing. The owner of the earth was replaced by self-conscious apes, and human beings became the wild animals for them to hunt for research. The broken Statue of Liberty by the sea is the symbol of this piece of "wasteland". At that time, the United States was bogged down in the Vietnam War. Thousands of soldiers lost their lives in a senseless war, meanwhile, conflict broke out between anti-war activists and activists in the United States. That same year, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were both assassinated... The appearance of this film is in line with people's uneasy psychology at that time, so the doomsday

atmosphere in the film and the prevailing pessimism in reality became compatible.

In 1973, when the first oil crisis broke out, there was a lot of violence in the fight for oil, which was the social background of Mad Max, which was released in 1979. In reality, a series of conflicts for oil turned into a road chase in the context of the fuel crisis in the first movie in the series, which later deteriorated into a fuel war and water war. The film depicts a chaotic society, a vast desert, a furious motorcycle gang, and angry police began a story of pursuing revenge. The film's unintentionally apocalyptic "broken aesthetics" also makes a bold attempt to shape the "wasteland film".

Wasteland films always depict the imagined future, either far or near, as a utopian or dystopian form, but to our surprise, the imagined future in wasteland film is very close to a reasonable extension of our real situation. Although in the eyes of most people, wasteland film has been juxtaposing with disaster films and sci-fi film. But in fact, there is no precise positioning of wasteland film at present. Most of the time, it belongs to the branch of sci-fi film, but infected with a strong sense of visual wasteland [4]. After all, the biggest charm of wasteland film is the demo station of humanity and the deep thinking of human destiny.

Broken is a kind of nonsense. Similarly, the future is also a kind of nonsense. Looking for a future in tatters is arguably a huge and lonely excuse. When they try to appear in light and shadow with an endless bleak background, they are inevitably based on the following pessimistic presuppositions:

2.1. Ambiguous time and place

As a three-dimensional creature, people cannot see the future and random disasters from the time axis. However, the development of society and the ultimate thinking of life and death run through the whole life, but the fear accompanied by anxiety always exists. This fear, in its expression, was a forlorn and solemn heaviness of solitude, a delicate sense of sadness and fatalism at the mercy of fate, in which there was also an element of dark fantasy.

Filmmakers who truly understand the world and human nature will choose the future as their medium of expression. The future world of each face is a realistic representation of the current development of the earth.

When it comes to movies, most of them rarely depict the doomsday directly, but focus more on the doomsday. For example, in *Mad Max II (1981)*, the background of the film is set as the earth after the depletion of resources, with life fading away, dreams destroyed, order gone, and everything back to the original state. Under the law of the jungle, only ruthless predators have the right to live. Nomad Max and road warriors chase each other for fuel to live on. In the uninhabited desert, with its skulls-mounted locomotives, its

Mohawk, its riveting leather, its iron masks, and its grimy image, a harsh, bleak vision of the doomsday emerges, and the broken aesthetics take shape.

When the decadence of the world to the extreme, the richness of human nature can be shown. The future fate of human beings has always been the focus of filmmakers. In their imagination of the future, death and destruction have always dominated people's fragile nerves. Countless filmmakers have recorded a piece of ruins with the lens, and carefully depicted the whole process of the decline of the world towards the future. All this cold and hard destruction is supposed to be a warning to the present people, just as The Bible has long pointed to the attribution of human beings to the judgment of the future. On this basis, the wasteland film's conception of the future world's chaos is one more evidence...

2.2. Diversity of violence

When people feel that the problem can no longer be solved through communication, they will end to solve it via instinctive actions like violence and fighting. Eventually, barbarism will become the new way of communication.

When the lack and desolation after the destruction of the world on the screen again and again, the rich imagination will make the audience face the ruins. The rational people reflect on the problems of human beings. On the contrary, the irrational people drift with the fist can solve problems.

The visual beauty that comes directly from the details of the violence is so-called "violence aesthetics", and in the midst of apocalyptic destruction, violence is given new life by barbarism in the ruins, they are strong and crude. The theme of wasteland film is usually the story after the end of the world, and the scenes of the end of the world cannot be separated from abandoned cities, dilapidated buildings, and chaotic and crazy people. The reason for this ending is inseparable from barbarism and violence.

Human nature has not been able to get rid of barbarism, violence is the stubborn disease of human society.

In the combat animation *Fist of the North Star* (1984), the nuclear war that swept the world ended human civilization, the earth cracked and the sea dried up. In order to survive, the human beings who survived by chance had to fight for fresh water and food. Here, almost all the elements of the end times are included. In the movie, the hard city of high-rise buildings and concrete are replaced by a desert and ruins, which are fictional and imaginary.

In such bleak scenes, one person stands alone, and tries to stop the air of despair from spreading. In order to save the lives of the people, the hero walks alone in the ruined earth, and becomes the saviour against the power. He had no choice but to confront the world with violence. Only in this process, people feel, more or despair.

The sombre tone, the violent scene, this despair in the face of the materialized fact forms a kind of compound multivariate broken aesthetic feeling, decadent and desolate.

2.3. Realistic future

In fact, rather weird and logically, it was at the end of the first decade of the 21st century that the doomsday feeling returned. From Hollywood big-budget productions *2012* (2009) to b-level melodrama *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World* (2012), independent American movie *4:44 Last Day On the Earth* (2011), from European art films *Melancholia* (2011) to *Perfect Sense* (2011) such a small cost of high-quality works. Although it is true that the Christian doomsday imagination has been the source and origin of doomsday complex, but at the beginning of the new century, which has just passed the end of the Christian millennium, this round of popularity has a special cultural meaning. The obvious cultural symptom is that we are all too aware of the structural crisis of today's world and prefer to keep our eyes shut, because the end of the 20th century and the "great failure" seem to declare the bankruptcy of various schemes and efforts to find alternative ways out of modern civilization [3].

In such films, what is associated with the future is not the expected beauty, but the decay, the decline, and the killing. However, in such a completely decayed world, in the face of death and ugly, human beings can erupt out of unimaginable power. Therefore, it is a kind of apocalyptic mood with hope and grand description, and it contains the cold and hard power, which is the residual ideal in the hearts of human beings.

Life is always painful, full of the desire and instinct of destruction. The presence of ruins, then, may portend a glimmer of rebirth. The film is full of desolation scene, is probably the best explanation of the human desire for change, when everything in the world will die out, the discussion of life will suddenly become meaningless, so the most meaningful or think about the despair of life after what to do...

3. BROKEN AND BEAUTY

Since the birth of the film, it has been developing its own vocabulary. The mirror, the clock, the subway, the neon at night, the car wiper, the heat from the sewer, these elements have become the mature language of the film [4]. The movie *2012* (2009) proves that the public's almost religious fear and awe of the doomsday coexist closely with the desire for entertaining consumption. Ruins, brokenness, the atmosphere of the end of the world... Symbolic functions have been developed to match the overall temperament and environment of the world today. Such films are like opiates,

which release people's anxiety and loneliness in the visual effect and achieve a sense of security and belonging.

In fact, the wasteland film shows the audience a possibility that beauty and ruins can coexist. When broken and beauty these two seemingly deadly enemies of the word mix, they will become a peculiar kind of beauty. Moreover, the impact brought by the broken beauty is far more novel, memorable, and creative than the traditional beauty.

Ruins are the limits of decay, or the remnants of the past. Perhaps their beauty lies in the fact that they lie between being and dying. Brokenness not only refer to destruction, but also shows a spiritual force that points to the future, a possibility that can be brought together again. It is Hegel's thought to find hope in pessimism and to breed an optimistic will in a pessimistic mind.

The fabulous hard-cold beauty produced by the wasteland destruction is different from traditional aesthetics, wasteland film just subvert the usual sense of beauty, the seedy scene is romantic and beautiful in the dense and ambiguous light, and the feeling of beauty is a kind of erratic, because most associated with less rough, turbulence and instability[5]. Wasteland film does not usually have the kind of fine texture that modern technology can portray. Its lens is often shaky, the picture is often grainy, and the scene is often full of darkness. However, such shaking, rough and dark, not pure primitive, but the tension, a sense of strong metal taste. Hence, it is enough to become a symbol of the era. Therefore, beauty can also be found in ruins, so as warmth in solitude, and truth in absurdity... [6].

4. CONCLUSION

"Instead of examining, movies give us a world more in tune with our desires. That's the story of that world."

— David Bowie'

People always feel very anxious when they read novels and films containing "broken aesthetics". Such as *Dark City* (1998), *Sin City* (2005), *Blade Runner* (1982), etc. these works tend to depict the story of the future [7]. But it was at that time when science and technology developed to a very high level and was placed in the future that we are extremely looking forward to at this moment. However, our civilization is like a double-edged sword, which brings not only the change of the quality of life, but also the destruction of the social system and moral standards. This anxiety does not come from the outside, but from the inside, and these stories go straight to the most vulnerable corners of our hearts. The world in the wasteland is in the near future, but the story is told with a thick color of realism. This world only homo sapiens from the brutal beast out of the development of their own civilization, but like a closed loop, cycle, the end has become a starting point, cannot escape the law. As the tide

returns, history is the future. The once enlightened Iran, the now devastated Syria, the new President of the United States, the history is not on the books, the future is not in the distance, they are here.

When the existing order of civilization is destroyed, when everything goes back to the primitive state of ruin, where should the human beings go? To be or not to be has been a serious problem since ancient times. On this basis, the wasteland film not only shows the process of human reconstruction and order, but also discusses the human struggles and choices of the survivors. It is both a story and a thought, which is also the reason why this film type has been full of vitality for half a century. After all, we have seen a lot of destruction in the world. It is a good thing to believe that a flower can grow on the wasteland.

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