

Seeing and Being Seen

Discussion on the Reconstruction of the Relationship between Image and Reality

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ABSTRACT

With the wide application of digital imaging technology, the importance of film aesthetics has been questioned, and the relationship between image and reality has gradually become a topic of discussion. To explain the concept of "seeing and being seen" and reconstruct the relationship between image and reality, this paper mainly discusses it from two aspects. The first part mainly explains how to present "seeing and being seen" between image and reality in the relationship between film and performance. The second part of seeing and being seen is about the image and the audience, which mainly evaluates several media parts with self-expression, non-personal presentation of ideas, and self-representation. Thus, further, determine whether the relation between show and audience has been detached from reality. This paper will discuss the dependence and separation between image and reality through these two parts. This paper holds that modern digital image technology development alienates the performance subject. The "performance" of users or producers in the media in front of the audience leads to the separation of image and reality. This paper will supplement a new research perspective and case analysis for contemporary art aesthetics.

Keywords: Image, Reality, Seeing and being seen

1. INTRODUCTION

Human eyes and the camera itself could deconstruct the spectating of the film. The scene in the man with a movie camera illustrates the regular scenery in Moscow. Vertov, the director of the film, provides the camera with at least one ability, which is the ability to see. More importantly, the guidance of the view is not the camera itself but the man behind it. Thus, the action-term to machines is defined by human beings; all the expressions are required by humans and served by machines [1].

The man with a movie camera may naturally insert the idea of "mimetic faculty" based on morphological similarities between the human being and the camera [2], that the camera's facility has been imaginatively attributed to human capacities. However, according to Vertov's film theory, the camera has the ability to "distending time, dissecting movement, or, in contrary fashion, absorbing time within itself, swallowing years, thus schematizing processes of long duration inaccessible to the normal eye" [3]. In other words, there is an immense gulf between the camera and human eyes, the interaction is not imitation, but the camera is

fundamentally much more powerful than the human eyes and able to reveal what the human eyes cannot see [4]. Through all the expression of the film, the key term "Kino-Eye" has been stated as "to record and organize the individual characteristics of life's phenomena into a whole, an essence, a conclusion" [5].

However, with the development of technology, the "Kino-Eye" has gradually changed into "Kino-Brush". In the 20th century, the time period of the Kino-Eye, the role of the cinema was to capture and to record the visible reality; the lack of ability to modify provide cinema's property about authenticity as the digital cinema becomes to be a larger trend, the era that is mainly recording the visual reality result as an exception. Thus, the Kino-Brush replace the Kino-Eye. According to Manovich, he believes the cinema needs to be redefined during the change. Manovich defines digital cinema as "live action footage + painting + image processing + compositing + 2D computer animation + 3D computer animation" [6], and digital cinema is only an exception in animation. Therefore, Manovich believes that the history of the moving image constitutes a complete cycle. The film is born in animation, the usage of cinematic realism pushing

animation to the edge of cinema and dominating the expression of the cinema. Finally, the film is called an exception case in animation and the cinematic realism only become an option [6].

With the extensive use of digital imaging technology, the importance of the film aesthetic has been questioned a lot. People need to reconsider the status of authenticity in the new era. Based on the interpretation of Bazin's image ontology, the theory mainly focuses on the "view of reality", but not the pattern to return the reality [7]. Nowadays, people still remain the requirements of authenticity for digital cinema. The "view of reality" can only be present by considering both the photograph's authenticity and the authenticity of the characters' psychology. Therefore, reality is still a necessary feature in film aesthetics.

2. FILMING AND ACTING

To illustrate the concept of "seeing and being seen", a sample would be clear. A performance by Xu Zhen named *March 6* demonstrates such a concept. In work, dozens of on-site performers wear striped uniforms and black canvas shoes, an outfit that resembles that of a patient in a psychiatric facility. As the visitor enters the room, each performer chooses a visitor to follow throughout the gallery, staying 1.5 meters away at all times. The performer does not speak or make eye contact with the chosen visitor during this time, merely staring at their back until they leave the gallery. In this way, the artist dislocates the gallery's natural order of seeing and being seen-while they appreciate the art, psychiatric performers still appreciate them. The artwork unfolds the relationship between "seeing and being seen" through such an art performance, and this part of the essay will interpret this relationship with filming and acting.

The actor and actress's action in front of the camera has been doubted to be alienating. The position of the actor or actress is always the object of the filming and the acting is unable to reveal the reality. According to the definition of alienation, the object produced by the subject is not only separated from the subject itself and become the difference of the subject but also turn away from the object, dominate and even suppress the subject. In short, alienation is the inversion of subject and object, that people lose their position as subjects, and are suppressed, bound and even controlled by objects. For the film, the key is that actors perform themselves in front of machinery, not for people in front of the audience. In the whole film art, actors are always in the object position. He performed for the machine, and the power behind the machine controlled his performance. The characteristics of the actor or actress are unable to avoid objectivity. Secondly, the whole performance is mechanical. Film actors may need to repeat a performance continuously to meet artistic standards. With the tons of repeating time, the actor loses control of the body itself. Thirdly, the

connection between the actor and the audience is indirect, which the acting received by the audience is the technical self through technical means. Fourthly, film actors themselves do not contact the audience. Their own performance behavior cannot be determined by themselves, but by the capital behind the machine, market orientation and other aspects. The position of the acting is passive. So far, based on the regular image of the actors or actresses, their characteristics are objectivity, mechanical, indirectness, and passivity.

Lacking the basis for a complete presentation of the actors' performances, the images in the film are a relatively more comprehensive record. For example, in the film *Blow-Up*, Thomas is a peeper. He also understands peep and occupies the representations of his way of violating others and exercising his rights. In a sense, in Thomas, representation empties the real, imprisoning or paralyzing his ability to live and act. A typical scene is that of Thomas photographing the female model in black. To obtain an erotic image, Thomas constantly titillates her, putting the woman in a state of great arousal. Once the shoot is completed, Thomas immediately dropped her coldly, leaving her in the erotic aftermath. For Thomas, it is important to acquire and possess the appearance, not the actual woman and desire. The woman here is related to objectivity and mechanical.

However, the mode of the acting is defined through the mainstream method. There may still have some other resolution to resolve the alienated circumstance of actors. Bresson refers to name actors as models, and apart from the difference in the language he calls them, his shaping of the performance is also different. According to his idea of human models, it's "movement from the exterior to the interior (Actors: movement from the interior to the exterior.)" [1]. His cinematograph focuses on the model's "pure essence" that eliminates any idea from the model himself and "protected models against any thought". In Bresson's films, the viewer does not see the traditional acting style: even those images that express emotions are performance using neutral language and blank facial expressions. The viewer cannot see the actor's motives in his eyes or further anticipate the plot. To illustrate the performance, these people look like talking to themselves. They exclude the distractions in their minds and follow the nature of human beings without making deliberate changes. At the same time, Bresson does not reuse his "models", that to avoid repetitive model performances, he uses different models for each film. In such a way of acting, he affirms the actor's being as an object in filming or even reinforces such characteristic and appreciates this way of presentation is closer to pure essence and human nature.

The mechanical may also become necessary. To kill models' will and bring them to the effect to fulfill the purpose appropriately, the endlessly repeated shots exhausting them. Thus, the models who have worked

with Bresson will not return to the stage to perform again. Therefore, the action of the model conforms to the characteristics of mechanical. Bresson's cinematograph demonstrates the mechanical smoothness of the model, creating a sense of strangeness and detachment between the model and the character, the film and the audience. It avoids the emotional and psychological empathy of the audience that is received from the actor's performance. He provides the audience with more space to think in a way that flattens everything. To abandon any idea of representation, he believes, "The thing that matters is not what they show me but what they hide from me and, above all, what they do not suspect is in them. Between them and me: telepathic exchanges, divination." [1] Hence his films abandon the commercial, entertaining audience. Instead of that, his models allow a unique group of audiences to focus on abundant content and audiovisual elements.

In the end, to achieve the essence of the human, he determines the stage of the model as an object, mechanizes the model's acting. His model makes the communication between audience and model more indirect but reduces passivity. His idea makes the models' current status not compelled to object but choose to object. However, even the choice is positive, and it still indicates the fact that the model has been alienated. Plus, the characteristics of mechanical and indirectness, Bresson may just provide different kinds of the route for acting but still be unable to resolve the fundamental problems.

Moreover, through the development of technology, the technology alienated the body of the acting. The development of technology has completely changed the previous mode of contact between people, people, and the world. It has made technology an essential part of the human body. Without phones, computers and the Internet are basically the same as being isolated from the world. On the one hand, people enjoy the convenience brought by technology, and on the other hand, they are swept into the new fast-paced century by technology. Second, with the continuous progress of productivity brought by the development of science and technology, more and more think that technology can determine almost everything and ignore the human ability and humanistic world.

From the perspective of Japanese theater master Tadashi Suzuki, modern society values result over process because of the increasing detachment of people's bodies from real life. Modern technology has diluted the physical experience and daily life and has also diluted people's individual self and group identity [8]. Under the influence of contemporary cyber-smart technology, human communication has shifted from a bodily, biological mode to an out-of-body, virtual, electronic mode, which focuses on out-of-body experiences. People are more stimulated by non-animal energy sources (e.g., electricity, oil) than before, just like the bright lights of nightclubs, the non-animal energy bombards and

influences the modern senses all the time in modern society.

In acting, he finds that most contemporary plays have been modernized because of their excessive use of non-animal energy. Comparing this with the pre-modern theater of Japanese Noh plays, Tadashi Suzuki concludes that one of the negative results of contemporary theater's use of non-animal energy in all its aspects is that humans have separated bodily functions from the physical faculties, arguing that modernization has completely 'dismembered' our bodily functions [8].

3. IMAGE AND THE AUDIENCE

The second part of seeing and being seen is about the show (or image) and the audience. The word "show" is not limited to any single media: film, photograph, advertisement, social media, or even a selfie on the phone. To illustrate what we mean by the relationship of seeing and being seen in this part, this part will mainly evaluate several parts of the media with self-expression (focus on the formation of film or drama), non-personal presentation of ideas (advertisement), and self-representation (social media). Thus, further, determine whether the relation between show and audience has been detached from reality.

Before illustrating the relationship between the show and the audience, the potential of ability that the media have the ability to influence the audience need to be considered. Advertisement, a media with the presentation of the image including a number of investigations in marketing which provides the data interact the audience, could be a useful media to elaborate such problem.

To introduce the media, advertising is usually defined as any paid advertising in which an identified sponsor displays ideas, goods and services in a non personal manner. The object or the evaluation of the advertisement's effectiveness depends on the audience or consumer. In commercial or non-commercial activities, the ads always have to convey the information and communicate with the audience; the advertisement fundamentally connects with the audience. Moreover, advertisement usually appears when audiences or spectators pay little attention to the information and take advertisements as trivial. Thus, the ads need to have the property to engage the audience in low-involvement learning. In such a situation, the advertisement still has to achieve its target that to exert audiences' beliefs, actions and desires. To sum up, the intention to influence other people is initiated with ads.

However, according to Rancière, his stance about dissensus or the disconnected nature of the contemporary aesthetic regime make the image powerless put forth the problem: whether or not an image or the advertisement have the power to affect the mass. In his theory, before our current aesthetic regime, the mimetic regime with the

very togetherness and consistency in sensory experience and presentation has the ability to change the mind of the masses since the spectator perceives the image in the same way. However, in our current aesthetic regime, the spectator no longer understands the image in the same way but is more likely defined by their disconnected perception and their individuality. Therefore, theoretically, the image cannot persuade the mass of anything because the difference in understanding leads to the lack of consistency.

Nonetheless, in empirical speaking, the analysis provides evidence that the advertisement is effective. With several processes in cognition, retrieval and sense-making, the evidence supports that "By analyzing 324 meta-analytic effect sizes taken from 44 meta-analyses that included more than 1,700 primary studies with more than 2.4 million subjects, the meta-meta-analytic effect size of 2 shows that advertising is effective." [9, 10]. Based on the evidence, the advertisement as a tool has great ability and power to influence consumers' behaviors and promote a certain lifestyle. Since as long as the advertisement or image have the ability to shape the mass with consistency, it has the ability to influence a certain portion of the mass. Thus, our current system of seeing and being seen in the discussion of the image is possible to affect the mass, including any individuals. The presentations of ideas or goods come from the market and the society. Since the society occupies the target audience, and all the audiences and consumers form the society. Thus, all the communication cannot avoid being a circular interaction in the society with affecting and understanding.

As communication has been built up, the image can affect individuals and the masses in society. To fulfill the advertisement's goal, the presentation's subject is no longer the expression of the image but gradually changed into the audience. Clearly, to go through the launch of an advertisement, there is no motivation to achieve any reality. Plus, in commercial parts of the advertisement, the advertising image is impossible to avoid promoting capitalism's dominant economic power structure. Indeed, the advertising image further deflected from reality with aligning with the idea of "the spectacle." In conclusion, there is a lack of reality in advertising images perceived by spectators.

The creation of the film and drama, including the script writing, is still highly related to communication. We have to admit that the initial ideas of a film come from the surrounding, which is the public made by people, and the immense society. As the target audience is the main part of the society, and all the audiences form the society. Like the statement above, the image has the ability to influence. Therefore, same as the image, the communication would be a circular interaction in the society.

People-to-people, which to communicate, the accuracy of the information to convey is fundamental. According to mainstream ideas of scripts design, as a media, one important factor of the film is to communicate that to receive understanding from the audiences. Thus, the film language needs to be as clear as possible and further engender empathy in the target audience. Moreover, through the entire filmmaking process, the connection of such a relationship needs to be made. The connection is needed to be considered in writing and in directing parts. To choose an appropriate scene and set up the *mise-en-scène* have to connect with the audience. To achieve the connection, the setting of the *mise-en-scène* needs to be in a tone, location and scenario that the audience relates to, understands, and empathizes with.

For example, in a real-life situation, to express Chekhov's realism in *Three Sister*, why the final scene has been set in a garden full of birch trees rather than some other possible locations. The result of choice is made by the director's intention: how he wants to relate and affect the audience, and further presents the phrase "We must live". Tasashi Suzuki states his understanding of the connection "A director commits to these choices based on his relationship to contemporary audiences and the theatrical sensitivities they have cultivated" [8].

We may need to accept that the precondition of the understanding is the set-up of the connection. Nonetheless, the connection could lead to a controversial end. No matter to fit with the present audience and present era, there may always be an imaginary audience in directors' minds. According to Edward Zwick, the directors have to communicate with audiences and estimate their reactions. The process can be considered to suit the audience since connecting with the audience is too purposefully. Moreover, in the cycle of communication, the consideration of the audience becomes blurred as to whether to express clearly or to cater, and it is difficult to distinguish whether the film is catering to the audience or is free expression. As the express becomes unfree and gradually detaches from self-expression, the communication process may fail to be made. In the end, since we cannot estimate the creators' intention, we are unable to distinguish reality through the work. But the probability of the deviation from reality is necessary to be considered.

4. CONCLUSION

To understand the spectator in the context of individuals, social media would be a valuable plant form to expose the relationship with visible records. In the circumstance of social media, the boundaries between audience and producers have been blurred. Unlike any other media, social media are likely to include more users in producing information such as digital storytelling and meaning production. Moreover, different from the world offline, mediation is the main force to form all the

interactions. Interactions involved all the social, cultural, technological and economic contexts; in detail, it involved the interaction of the company, the company's policies, and the users. Whether self-representation can avoid is quite debatable. We're able to show that we are critical, but we cannot escape making any kind of self-representation since we are in the social context and we need to present ourselves to connect. And we have to admit the communication in social media do draw division with normal "talk".

Based on the concept of "seeing and being seen", this paper discusses the relationship reconstruction between image and reality from two aspects. The first part mainly focuses on the relationship between film and performance, and the second part discusses the relationship between image and audience. This paper holds that modern digital image technology development alienates the performance subject. The media "performance" of users or producers in front of the audience leads to the separation of image and reality. This paper will be beneficial to provide a new research perspective and case analysis for contemporary art aesthetics.

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