Film Art and Western Aesthetic Thought: An Analysis from Enlightenment to Postmodernism

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Abstract: The relationship between film art and Western aesthetic thoughts has always been a topic of deep thought in the field of humanities and cultural studies. This paper aims to explore the evolution and interaction between film art and Western aesthetic thought by analyzing the historical process from Enlightenment to postmodernism. By exploring this relationship in depth, we can better understand how film as an art form has been shaped and inspired by the aesthetic ideas of different periods. During the Enlightenment, aesthetic ideas that emphasized rationality, objectivity, and freedom had an impact on early cinema. Film became a medium that reflected human life through objectivity and authenticity and embodied the ideas of the Enlightenment. The subsequent Romanticism, with its emphasis on emotion, personal experience, and transcendence, pushed the film to further explore the possibilities of emotional expression and imagination. Realism aesthetics emphasizes the depiction of real life and leads filmmakers to turn their attention to social issues and daily life. As a mirror of society, film reflects the influence of realism on artistic creation. Impressionism and symbolism introduced the concepts of perception and metaphor in the film, which enriched the visual expression of the film. The emergence of modernism challenged the traditional forms and concepts, prompting the emergence of experimental film creation. Then, postmodernism further breaks the boundaries between narrative structure and reality, emphasizing diversity, ambiguity and ambiguity. Film, as a medium, constantly explores the visual and conceptual possibilities of postmodernist ideas. To sum up, the relationship between film art and Western aesthetic thought is a constantly changing process. This evolution process shows how aesthetic thoughts shape the aesthetic view, narrative mode and creative style of film. By studying this relationship, we gain insight into how film as an art form evolves and innovates in different aesthetic contexts.
Keywords: Film Art, Western Aesthetic Thought, Enlightenment; Postmodernism, Aesthetics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Film art, as a unique visual art form, is not only the record of culture,

but also the expression of aesthetic thoughts. At the same time, Western aesthetic thought, as a series of philosophical thoughts about art, beauty, authenticity and value, has deeply influenced various artistic fields, including film. This thesis aims to explore the interrelationship between film art and Western aesthetic thought, and how the historical process from the Enlightenment to postmodernism has shaped the aesthetic, narrative and creative style of film. The origins of cinema can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when Western aesthetic thought was undergoing major changes. From the rationalism of the Enlightenment to the pluralism of postmodernism, the continuous evolution of aesthetic thought has shaped the development trajectory of film as an artistic medium. The emphasis on rationality and objectivity during the Enlightenment influenced the pursuit of authenticity and objectivity in early cinema (Bazin, 1967).

Romanticism, on the other hand, placed emotion and personal experience in an unprecedented position and profoundly influenced the emotional expression and imagination of film. During the period of realism, artists sought to depict real life, and this view was reflected in film, making film a mirror of society. The ideas of impressionism and symbolism introduced the concepts of perception and symbolism and expanded the expression of film. The impact of modernism promoted the rise of experimental film creation (Carroll, 2007), while postmodernism blurred the boundaries between narrative and reality, challenging the traditional aesthetic concept and narrative structure. Through this evolution process, we can see how the film and the Western aesthetic ideas continue to integrate and influence each other. This relationship has profoundly influenced the direction of film creation and shaped the aesthetic orientation and style of films in different periods (Tomlinson et al., 1986). This paper will explore this relationship in depth in order to find a deeper understanding of the intersection of film art and aesthetic thought, and also look forward to the possible development direction of film in the future (Eisenstein, 2014).

2. FILM AND AESTHETIC THOUGHT IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT PERIOD

The Enlightenment was an intellectual revolution in the late 18th and early 19th centuries that promoted reason, science, and individual freedom

as central to human progress. The aesthetic ideas of this period not only profoundly influenced the artistic fields of literature, painting and music, but also had a significant impact on the development of early films, laying the foundation for the aesthetic and narrative style of film creation (Hansen & Hansen, 2004).

2.1 The Pursuit of Rationality and Objectivity

One of the core ideas of the Enlightenment was the pursuit of reason, which advocated understanding the world through rational thinking and scientific methods. This pursuit influenced early filmmakers to try to present images in an objective and scientific way. Early films were often shot in stop-motion, similar to observation and recording in a laboratory, in an attempt to show how things really looked. This is consistent with the Enlightenment's pursuit of objectivity and authenticity. Through film, people can go to the "field" as observers to understand the human behavior and environment of that era (Emad, 2018; Jameson, 2016; Xu & Li, 2019).

2.2 Authenticity and Reflection of Real Life

The aesthetic thoughts of the Enlightenment emphasized authenticity and the depiction of real life, trying to reflect the real situation of human beings through art works. This idea was reflected in the field of film, the early films not only focused on fiction, but also paid more attention to depicting People's Daily life and social environment. By recording human behavior and interactions, film becomes a window into the reality of society. "Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory" (1895), for example, shows workers leaving the factory at the end of the day, a simple but realistic reflection of a corner of industrialized society at the time.

2.3 Standardization of Narrative Structure

Another characteristic of Enlightenment thought is its emphasis on order and logic. This order and logic is reflected in the narrative structure of early films. The narrative of early films was often linear and clear, showing the story in a causal way. To some extent, this narrative mode reflects the Enlightenment thought's emphasis on the order and rationality of human thinking.

Through a clear narrative structure, the film is able to convey information in a methodical way, making the storyline easier for the audience to understand and accept. However, it is worth noting that the development of early films was subject to technical and production

limitations, which also limited the development of films in terms of expressive diversity and creativity. In the continuous interaction with society, technology and other art forms, film art has gradually evolved its unique language and expression (Mulvey, 2013).

It is obvious that the aesthetic thought of the Enlightenment period has influenced the early films. As a new art form, film tries to show the world view emphasized by Enlightenment thought through objectivity, authenticity and narrative norms. Over time, however, films have gradually moved beyond these limitations, showing more creativity and variety. In the next part of this thesis, we will continue to explore how the film art continues to evolve and develop under the influence of aesthetic thoughts such as Romanticism, realism and impressionism.

3. THE INFLUENCE OF ROMANTICISM ON FILM ART AND AESTHETIC THOUGHT

Romanticism was a cultural movement of the early to mid-19th century that emphasized emotion, personal experience, and the pursuit of transcendence. The aesthetic thought of this period had a profound influence on the development of film art and promoted the transformation of film creation from objective presentation to emotional expression.

3.1 The Importance of Emotion and Personal Experience

Romanticism emphasizes emotion and inner experience as central to human existence. This view was reflected in films, where filmmakers began to focus on the emotions and inner lives of the characters. Early films attempted to convey emotion through actors' performances, music, and pictorial language, enabling the audience to empathize emotionally with the characters. For example, in "A Trip to the Moon" (1902), the filmmakers used special effects and fantasy scenes to express emotion and imagination (Rotha, 1967).

3.2 Imagination Beyond Reality

Romanticism advocates imagination beyond reality and tries to break through the shackles of everyday life. Film, as an art form with visual and sound effects, can make the imagination more vivid. Early films began experimenting with special effects, fantasy Settings, and fantasy stories to create memorable visual experiences. This spirit of pursuing transcendence echoes the core concept of Romanticism and brings greater creative space

to film creation.

3.3 Change of Narrative Style

Romanticism also influenced the narrative style of the film. The traditional linear narrative is expanded and transformed, and more non-linear narrative and psychological depiction begin to appear. Filmmakers began to use memories, dreams and other techniques to show the inner emotions and thoughts of the characters, making the narrative of the film more rich and diversified. This change in narrative style highlights the importance of personal experience and emotion in the creation of films (Bordwell, 2003).

The influence of Romanticism on film art and aesthetics can not be ignored. The emotional emphasis and the pursuit of imagination in this period made the film develop from the objective presentation to the field of emotional expression and imagination. Through the resonance of emotions and the expansion of imagination, film began to become a medium that could touch the audience's emotions and trigger imagination. In the next part of this thesis, we will continue to explore how realism, impressionism and other aesthetic ideas have influenced the development and evolution of film.

4. REALISM AND SOCIAL REFLECTION OF FILM

4.1 Presentation of Real Life

Realism, as an important aesthetic trend, emphasizes the presentation of real life in art works to truly reflect People's Daily behavior and social environment. This concept has been deeply reflected in the art of film, guiding filmmakers to point their cameras at every corner of society to show the real life of people. Early films were no longer limited to abstract fantasy, but tried to capture the details of the real world through the camera. For example, A Time to Eat (1909) is a short film from the early cinema, which presents a real picture of rural life by showing farmers toiling at harvest time, so that the audience can feel the reality of life (Wollen, 2019).

4.2 Attention to Social Issues

Realism seeks to deeply reveal the ills and injustices of society, making film a window through which audiences can recognize and focus on social issues. Filmmakers began to focus on social issues to help people recognize

the inequalities and injustices in society. The early 20th century film "The Hurricane" is a prime example of this, as it explores colonialism, race, and social class by telling the story of human fate on a small island, deeply reflecting the realities of society.

4.3 Presentation of Daily Life

The aesthetic thought of realism emphasizes attention to everyday life and tries to view the world from the perspective of ordinary people. Film has become a tool to record daily life, showing People's Daily activities, interactions and emotions. This focus gives the film more depth and resonance in presenting people's universal experiences. For example, Charlie Chaplin's silent films such as "Modern Times" satirize mechanization in an industrial society, showing the daily lives of ordinary workers and giving viewers a deeper experience of reality.

Realism has a lasting and far-reaching influence in the field of film. Through films, social issues are explored in depth and People's Daily lives are truly presented, enabling the audience to have a deeper understanding of society and humanity. As the carrier of realism aesthetics, film helps people to pay attention to and think about social problems, and strengthens the influence of art on society. In the subsequent part of this paper, we will continue to explore how impressionism, symbolism and other aesthetic ideas play a role in the film, enrich the expression of the film and the meaning (Wood, 1960).

5. ART SCHOOL AND EXPERIMENTAL EXPRESSION OF FILM

5.1 Impressionism and Visual Experiments of Film

Impressionism was an artistic movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that emphasized light, color, and the capture of moments. In the field of film, this concept has had a profound impact on the visual expression of film. Filmmakers began experimenting with more unique photographic techniques, such as zoom, special shots, and light and shadow effects, to present the instant feel and look that Impressionism sought. The film "The Nightingale" (1926) uses light and shadow to create a flowing picture, as if the viewer were looking at a vivid Impressionist painting. The change of color and the movement of light and shadow make the audience feel the passage of time and reality, and achieve the visual feeling pursued by impressionism (Elsaesser, 2005).

5.2 Symbolism and Metaphorical Expression in Film

Symbolist art pursues metaphors and symbolic symbols to express deep emotions and philosophical reflections. This idea found expression in the field of film, where filmmakers began to try to convey themes and emotions in more abstract and metaphorical narratives. The film "The Innocent Criminals "(1920) uses symbolism to convey the complex emotions and philosophical reflections of the human inner world through symbols and symbolic scenes. The symbolic images in the film, such as mirrors, clocks, etc., carry deep symbolic meaning, so that the audience can experience the emotion and thinking beyond the surface in the process of watching the film.

5.3 Expressionism and Emotional Exaggeration in Movies

Expressionist art emphasizes the exaggeration of emotion and the expression of inner experience, trying to show the inner emotion and human psychological state through dramatic forms. In the field of film, this idea has inspired filmmakers to explore emotional expression. The film "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" (1920) uses distorted architecture and light and dark contrasts to create a distorted and disturbing world that highlights the emotions and inner experiences of the characters. This visual exaggeration brings the audience into a realm full of illusion and emotion, emphasizing the importance of emotion in film creation (Hutcheon, 2003).

Different artistic schools bring a variety of experimental expressions to film creation. The visual experiment of impressionism, the metaphorical expression of symbolism and the emotional exaggeration of expressionism all enrich the creation language and aesthetic sense of film. By using the characteristics of different artistic schools, filmmakers are able to deepen the presentation of themes, emotions and inner experiences, making films deeper and more expressive. In the subsequent part of this thesis, we will continue to explore how modernism, postmodernism and other aesthetic ideas play a role in film, and promote the innovation and change of film art.

6. POSTMODERNISM AND ANTI-TRADITIONAL EXPLORATION OF FILM

6.1 Features and Background of Postmodernism

Postmodernism is not only a kind of thought, but also a cultural and philosophical revolution, which has carried on a profound reflection and

reconstruction of the cognition and value system of modern society. This trend of thought rose rapidly in the second half of the 20th century, followed by a revolutionary creative wave in the field of film. Postmodernism's questioning and challenge to the inherent traditional concepts has had a profound impact on the creation of film art, and promoted the filmmakers to explore the aesthetic concept, narrative mode and image expression.

6.2 Fragmentation and Multiplicity of Narration

One of the core features of postmodernism is the fragmentation and multiplicity of narrative. In film creation, this feature is widely used, which makes the traditional linear narrative mode subverted and redefined. The film "Blue" (1993) explores the inner experience and emotional changes of the protagonist through the alternate presentation of different time nodes in a non-linear narrative way. This fragmented narrative mode not only enriches the film's level, but also enables the audience to participate in the construction of the story and feel the existence of multiple realities.

6.3 Surreality and Illusion

Postmodernism's distortion and subversion of reality is expressed in the form of film, which is often presented in a surreal and hallucinatory way. The film "Inception" (2010) explores the relativity of time, reality and memory with layers of nested dreams, creating a world of illusions and confusion. Through visual effects and non-linear plot unfolding, the audience is led on a journey of exploration beyond conventional reality, experiencing the postmodernist blurring of the boundaries between the real and the unreal.

6.4 Self-reflection and Meta-narrative

Postmodernism's rebellion against the traditional narrative mode is reflected in the practice of self-reflection and meta-narrative. The film "Storytelling" (2001) unfolds over two distinct story threads, reflecting on filmmaking and narrative itself as a single theme. By incorporating the creative process into the content of the film, filmmakers explore the boundaries and limitations of film creation, allowing viewers to think more deeply about film language and narrative mechanisms (James, 2007).

Post-modernism's anti-traditional exploration of film makes the film art get rid of the existing shackles and opens a door to innovation. Through the fragmentation of narrative, surreal presentation, and practice of self-

reflection, filmmakers are able to convey emotions, ideas, and concepts in entirely new ways. This anti-traditional exploration not only expands the expression technique of the film, but also enables the audience to gain greater freedom and participation in the aesthetic experience. At the end of this paper, we will make a comprehensive analysis of the influence of different art schools and films, and explore the diversity and innovation of film art (Naremore, 2008).

7. CONCLUSION

By deeply exploring the interweaving relationship between film art and Western aesthetic thought, this paper presents a rich and colorful film history, from Enlightenment to postmodernism, and reveals the profound influence of different aesthetic thoughts on film creation. In the conclusion part, we will summarize the main points of the paper, emphasizing how different aesthetic ideas have enriched the expression of film, expanded the creative thinking, and triggered the reflection of society, humanity and reality.

During the Enlightenment, film gradually sublimated from its early entertainment function to an art form of expressing ideas and exploring human nature. Rationalism and humanitarianism prompted the film to focus on social issues, showing human intelligence, confusion and contradictions through plots and characters. Romanticism infused the film with emotional depth and the flight of the imagination, making it a medium for conveying the emotional world of humanity. The pursuit of realism makes the film enter the daily life of ordinary people, present the real social environment and the fate of characters, and arouse the audience's concern about social issues. The experimental expression of art party film provides a more diversified creative path.

The visual experiment of impressionism, the metaphorical expression of symbolism and the emotional exaggeration of expressionism enrich the expression techniques of film and make the audience feel the unusual artistic impact in the aesthetic experience. These experimental explorations bring more creativity and possibilities to film creation. The rise of postmodernism opened a door to the unknown for film. Through the fragmentation of narrative, the presentation of surrealism and the practice of self-reflection, the art of film explores ways of expression beyond traditional frameworks. Postmodernism enables film creators to have more freedom in aesthetics, narration and thinking, and enables audiences to

experience a more open and inclusive aesthetic experience.

To sum up, the intermingling of film art and western aesthetic thoughts has brought rich ideas and artistic inspirations to film creation. Film is not only a way of entertainment, but also a kind of artistic language to explore the human heart, think about reality and express emotions. Through the influence of different aesthetic ideas, films show diversity, innovation and innovation in different historical periods. In the future, we can look forward to the integration of film art and new aesthetic ideas, which will continue to promote the development and change of film creation.

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