

Mass Culture and Aesthetic Changes in New Media Era

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Abstract

At the New media era, the rapid development of mass culture gives contemporary people a wealth of spiritual activities meanwhile exerts a subtle influence on people's conception. This paper holds that there are aesthetic conflicts between mass culture and high culture, and the emerging phenomenon of "Aesthetic Generation" and "Aesthetic Pleasure" will have a certain negative impact on people. It analyzes the impact of contemporary economy and technology on mass culture, expounds its three characteristics of commercialization, technicality and entertainment. It also explores consumerism, the cultural industry puts the masses in the second place and regards them as objects of calculation. If the media only emphasizes the commodity value of art rather than the aesthetic value, it will inevitably lead to the incorrect tendency of mass culture.

Keywords

Mass culture, consumerism, new media, aesthetic generation, aesthetic pleasure.

1. Introduction

Since the 20th century, Mass culture has replaced Classical Art became popular in people's daily life and also has had a great influence on aesthetic. Unlike some classical art, Mass culture belongs to the ordinary people and serves them, it can be understood by the public. Around the 1930s, faced with the appearance of Mass culture caused by urbanization, industrialization and technical development, the separation of upper-class art and folk art in traditional western art has changed. In modern times, this has become the confrontation between high culture and mass culture (MacDonald, p.1,1953). Behind all this is the fierce confrontation and conflict of aesthetic concepts. And controlled by consumerism, Aesthetic Generation and Aesthetic Pleasure became the dominant public aesthetic tastes. This means that works of art begin to be close to and reflect the life of the public, and people get short-term emotional resonance and enjoyment from them. In New media era, this has become particularly significant.

This essay will focus on Mass culture to analyze the influence of contemporary economy and technology on it, and the negative influence of Mass culture on Contemporary aesthetics change. Firstly, it explains the Mass culture and its three characters of commodity, technology and entertainment. Secondly, it analyzes the value of Mass culture, as well as limitation and misdirection of Mass culture from three characters. Finally, it shows the negative influence of "Aesthetic Generation" and "Aesthetic Pleasure".

The realization of Mass culture is consistent with the realization of commodity, technology and entertainment. First of all, commercial is the premise of mass culture. Sokolowski critical that "Culture is governed by the rules of the market" (p.301,2012). The realization of popular culture is closely related to industrial production. In order to create and open up the cultural market, organize the sales of products and maximize profits as soon as possible, it instinctively traces the consumption psychology of the masses and caters to their consumption tastes. However, the most important aim of it is to profit. It through best-selling novels, commercial movies, TV

dramas, various forms of advertising, popular songs, leisure newspapers, cartoon audio-visual products, MTV to achieve its aim.

Another one is that, the technical is the carrier of mass culture. Unlike traditional art and high culture often use print media as the carrier, while mass culture mainly uses electronic media as the carrier. Mass media have replaced the old cultural patterns of people's lives, such as books or spoken language. Media is the main form and place of contemporary social culture (Kellner, p.35, 2003). With the help of electronic media, mass culture can stride over the boundaries of stratum, language, region and tradition, and carry out "live broadcast" all over the world. John Fiske considers that, although technology can not directly change society, it can promote its change (p.7,1989). This industrial production makes art can be copied quickly and in large quantities.

Moreover, it is very important to think that, the entertainment is the center of mass culture. Art itself has entertainment character and it originates from people's recreational activities in leisure time. This traditional theory is initiated by Kant's "Kritik der Urteilskraft" in 1790 and Schiller's "Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen" in 1793. Mass culture as an art, its aim is to entertain and reflect the life of the masses. It is able to alleviate the pressure of fast-paced and tense life and provide entertainment. It through this entertainment gives people emotional sustenance, relaxing people's daily nervous and pressure, but over-entertainment can lead to people lack of independent thinking and numb. People might satisfy the present situation, beautify the reality, and even regard the illusory world which described in entertainment as the real world. Then it rejects people's dissatisfaction and anger with the existing society.

To sum up, as an important type of contemporary art, mass culture is born between art and commodity, technology and entertainment. It has great values to art and life, however, because of its characters, it has limitations and is easily controlled by consumerism and led to a misdirection. Mass culture has its contribution, and it greatly expands the boundaries of artistic content and aesthetic concepts. The art of the past is far away from ordinary people and pursuit of elitism. However, the contemporary aesthetic concept of art believes that the elite do not exist all the time in life, and the real life is often focus on the public. Besides, society is not only made up of elites, but also of the masses. The appearance of mass culture has enabled every ordinary person to find their own spiritual food. However, the limitations of the characteristics of mass culture have a negative impact on people in many ways. According to the mass society theory, because commercialization of mass art its empty and low value content, makes audiences detached from reality and numb, and finally makes them vulnerable to totalitarian rule (Blau, p.65,1986).

In the period when consumerism blinds the eyes of the masses, if the media only emphasize the commodity value rather than the aesthetic value of art will inevitably lead to the incorrect trend of mass culture. What reflects in the misdirection of mass art is that thought disappears from the works, the spirit exits from the body, reason divides from sensibility, beauty exodus from art. Then space replaces time, desire replaces passion, sensual pleasant replaces aesthetic experience. This is the result of mass culture centered on the benefit of money and profit. The cultural industry puts the masses in the second place and regards them as objects of calculation. In this way, the public becomes the object of popular culture but not the subject and the master (Adorno, p.1,1991). Thus, mass culture will above the masses, through consumption to occupy the money of masses, through the media to control the concept of the public, through entertainment to let the public spirit numb. In addition, the rise of mass culture has impacted the classical aesthetics, making contemporary aesthetics appear phenomenon of Aesthetic Generalization and Aesthetic Pleasure.

This section will focus on Aesthetic Generalization and Aesthetic Pleasure to show the dramatic changes of contemporary aesthetic. The most important thing is that their negative influence on people's aesthetic change may lead to the lack of independent and depth thinking of people.

Aesthetic Generalization is first reflected in the expansion of the scope of art. From traditional art to new art, such as movies, television, advertisements and behavioral arts. Art has expanded from the initial and narrow specific art categories to all the spirit fields of human beings, even to the purely desire fields. Especially after the rise of mass culture, aesthetics exists everywhere in everyday life. The focus of contemporary aesthetics emphasizes the attention to the cultural phenomena in daily life, that is, mass culture. Besides, contemporary aesthetics also pays attention to popular fashion. For example, fashion design and advertising design are not touched by classical aesthetics. Contrast classical aesthetics with contemporary aesthetics, classical aesthetics advocates beauty and sublime, regards tragedy as elegant and noble, comedy as inferior. This attitude of tragedy adoring comes from the ancient Greeks' respect for Dionysian culture (Nietzsche, p.109,1910). Whereas, the goal of mass culture is diverse public. In order to meet the aesthetic needs of different people at the same time, it must be adjusted to "average taste"(Sokolowski, p.301,2012). Therefore, contemporary aesthetics is based on popular comedy, which has a broad consumer market. Its style is standardization and advocates pleasure and commerce. With the further integration of culture and economy, meanwhile under the influence of new media, the cultural industry has created a variety of cultural imagination, entertainment forms and lifestyles.

German scholar Walter Benjamin considers that an aura, which is the unique aesthetic experience can be possessed only the original work of art. Moreover, he predicted that mechanical reproduction of works of art would make them lose their aura of the past (p.6,1969). Standardized design and mechanical production technology make art become a product that is constantly copied and collaged. The essence of over aestheticization is It is to satisfy consumer demand and desire. Then, it leads to the exhaustion of art and the loss of individuality. This generalization phenomenon is a false aesthetic illusion. After the loss of freshness, only sensory numbness and aesthetic tiredness remain, which eventually leads people to fall into the situation of aesthetic loss and spiritual emptiness.

Moreover, Aesthetic Pleasure includes physiological pleasure but it is richer and deeper than physiological pleasure. It is a kind of advanced spiritual experience. However, the change of contemporary aesthetic pleasure prefers to focus on the physiological pleasure. mass culture emphasizes the experience of physiological pleasure does not require deep spiritual pleasure and thinking. The pleasure of mass culture is nothing more than a sugar coat wrapped in ideology. Through the mass media, people indulge in the sensory pleasure which it provides them, they will unconsciously yield to the cognitive violence of ideology. There is an example of it, the over-entertainment of TV programs. Postman argues that, TV is for entertainment and fun, even if news programs are a form of entertainment, people can not get education and reflection from it (p.64, 1985). In daily life, the most frequently contacted information that people received is entertained. And as time goes on, people will be accustomed to and immersed in it. The worse is, with the rapidly develop of technology, the internet media gradually replaced the role of television became the most important way to convey more messy and large amounts of information to people.

In New media era, Mass culture is a kind of audio-visual culture and entertainment culture. Audio-visual culture provides high-density information content, which makes it impossible for the people to conscious information integral and analysis deep meaning in a short time. The audience is aroused more by physiological reactions, rather than profound ideological, much less not to mention deeper exploration and reflection on the meaning of life.

For example, in China, more and more people addicted to the Internet and various kinds of entertainment news. These popular Internet products could make people lose their thinking. Such as Tik Tok, an application which full of entertainment short video. At the end of the video, people don't even need to move their fingers, and they play the next video automatically. Attracted by this brief pleasure, people unconsciously waste hours. These Media are rapidly

increasing people demand for new things and pleasure, and at the same time, they reduce people need and patience for words. People don't think and reflect the information and they always look forward to the next novelty that catches their eyes and full of their pleasure, waiting for it to appear directly in the video. Moreover, one of the studies mentioned shows that, television has a very strong influence on global audiences. At least 90% of people think they learn from television, movies and videos (Wright & Sandlin, p.132, 2009). It shows the great effect of mass culture on human cognition.

However, people's initiative and ability of selection different mass culture can not be denied. In the age of media full of information, it is inevitably getting messy information all the time. Therefore, people should carefully choose whether to immerse themselves in physiological pleasure or to learn knowledge from mass culture.

There is neither lowliness nor nobleness in culture. Moreover, because the mass culture is still sustainable developing and growing, it is impossible to reach a final conclusion. To conclusion this essay, mass culture does not mean a negative art, nor does it necessarily lead to any misdirection. The reason of it is easier to lead to misdirection than other art types is that, as an art type born between art and commodity, technology and entertainment, a little negligence will lead to misdirection and promotes contemporary aesthetics in bad taste dilemma. It is not hard to see that, as artists, designers and consumers who involved in mass culture, can not be manipulated by consumerism and should improve the aesthetic level and pay more attention to spiritual prosperity rather than physiological pleasure. while providing a broad free space for the development of mass culture, people also can not let it go a misdirection.

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