

Visual Landscape Reconstruction and Aesthetic Evolution of Short Videos in the Intelligent Era: Post-Print

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Abstract

In the intelligent era, short videos, as a rapidly developing new type of aesthetic art, demonstrate rich contemporary significance and provide unique aesthetic experiences. The network attributes, virtual-reality fusion attributes, mobile attributes, and interactive attributes of short videos have altered traditional approaches to “spectacle” construction. As an entirely new aesthetic paradigm grounded in technology and centered on visibility, short videos are distinguished from conventional visual art forms, being no longer constrained by time and space, breaking the limitations between artistic creation and real social scenarios, and not adhering to the continuity of images constructed through symbols and behaviors, thereby exhibiting more epochal aesthetic significance. The aesthetic criteria of short videos display multiplicity, the aesthetic characteristics of short videos display virtuality, and the aesthetic approaches of short videos display pluralistic transformations, thus constituting a unique aesthetic visual spectacle. The reconstruction of the short video visual spectacle triggers further transformations at the aesthetic level and stimulates deeper aesthetic reflection.

Full Text

Visual Landscape Reconstruction and Aesthetic Evolution of Short Videos in the Intelligent Era

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Abstract: In the intelligent era, short videos have emerged as a rapidly developing new form of aesthetic art that exhibits rich contemporary significance and delivers unique aesthetic experiences. The network attributes, virtual-real

fusion attributes, mobility attributes, and interactive attributes of short videos have fundamentally transformed traditional approaches to “landscape” construction. As an entirely new aesthetic paradigm grounded in technology and centered on visual expression, short videos diverge from conventional visual art forms by transcending temporal and spatial constraints, breaking down barriers between artistic creation and real social scenes, and moving beyond the continuity of images constructed through symbols and behaviors. This demonstrates more epochal aesthetic significance. The aesthetic standards of short videos display multiplicity, their aesthetic characteristics exhibit virtuality, and their aesthetic approaches show pluralistic changes, collectively constituting a distinctive aesthetic visual landscape. The reconstruction of short videos’ visual landscape triggers further evolution at the aesthetic level, stimulating deeper aesthetic reflection.

Keywords: intelligent media; short videos; media landscape; aesthetic research

Since the internet entered China in the 1990s, network-based dynamic video art has developed with unstoppable momentum and incredible endogenous power. Particularly in the last decade, the popularity of network dynamic video art, represented by short videos, has become a global cultural trend and one of the most important contemporary practices of Chinese literature and art [1]. Unlike traditional dynamic video art, short videos represent a literary and artistic genre that relies primarily on network dissemination, exhibits distinct contemporary characteristics, and inherits artistic and aesthetic traditions. Grounded in internet-based artistic thinking, short videos constitute a new multi-dimensional aesthetic art form that encompasses creation, production, consumption, dissemination, and viewing. In the intelligent era, short videos as a visual landscape undergo aesthetic experiences that occur between digital technological beauty and artistic conceptual beauty, between perception and interaction, between reality and virtuality, between sensibility and rationality, and between massification and individualization, thereby establishing their aesthetic positioning, displaying their aesthetic characteristics, and constituting their aesthetic approaches.

The reason short videos have experienced explosive growth from non-existence to ubiquity in just two decades can be attributed to the media revolution brought about by the information technology revolution. Characterized by small file sizes, short playback duration, fragmented content, strong visual impact, flexible viewing scenarios, and rapid dissemination, short videos have become one of the most popular forms of visual video art. On one hand, short videos employ digital media technology to present dynamic video content and use artistic concepts to reflect real life, creating unparalleled aesthetic experiences. On the other hand, they utilize visual symbols to construct “watchable illusions” on intelligent media platforms—illusions that are purposeful and subjective, reflecting real life to some extent while simultaneously obscuring it.

1. Reconstruction of Short Videos' Visual Landscape

Short videos are typically understood as video content under five minutes in duration that relies on internet technology for dissemination. They have developed rapidly alongside China's internet information technology, reflecting an interactive relationship between art and technology while being comprehensively influenced by social development in specific historical periods [2]. The development of short videos has gone through an incubation period (2000-2004), an initial startup period (2005-2012), a growth period (2013-2017), and a rapid ascent period (2018-present), and has already achieved considerable scale. As of June 2021, China's online video (including short videos) user base reached 944 million, an increase of 17.07 million from December 2020, accounting for 93.4% of all internet users. Among them, short video users numbered 888 million, an increase of 14.4 million from December 2020, representing 87.8% of all internet users [9]. Short videos have become a typical example of revolutionary progress resulting from the fusion of art and technology.

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As an aesthetic object centered on visual expression, short videos not only create a unique visual artistic landscape but also reconstruct the public's approach to video art creation and aesthetics, profoundly transforming people's production and lifestyles. In the intelligent era, the network attributes, virtual-real fusion attributes, mobility attributes, and interactive attributes of short videos have changed traditional approaches to "landscape" construction. What they present is no longer a visual landscape that only a minority with specialized technical tools and platforms could construct while the majority silently observed. Instead, everyone can now construct media landscapes through intelligent platforms. This visual landscape has been reconstructed to become more personalized, decentralized, destandardized, and de-processed, allowing individuals to simultaneously assume dual identities: creators of aesthetic objects and aesthetic subjects themselves. Meanwhile, the emergence of intelligent technologies such as big data and algorithmic recommendation significantly influences people's aesthetic behaviors. Endless streams of content attract attention and satisfy diverse aesthetic preferences. Although audiences appear to have more content choices, they actually lose more aesthetic freedom due to big data and algorithmic recommendation technologies, as real social scenes are reduced to brief visual images and fragmented landscapes are perceived as complete representations of reality.

The reconstruction of short videos' visual landscape triggers further evolution at the aesthetic level. For the vast number of network audiences as aesthetic subjects, previous aesthetic experiences and knowledge reserves clearly show significant gaps. For government management departments and literary and art workers, this raises various aesthetic cultural issues and challenges that emerge

during development and practice.

2. Aesthetic Evolution of Short Videos

Distinct from the aesthetic characteristics of traditional dynamic video, short videos in the intelligent era are no longer constrained by time and space, breaking down limitations between artistic creation and real social scenes and moving beyond the continuity of images constructed by symbols and behaviors. This demonstrates more epochal aesthetic significance.

2.1 Multiplicity of Aesthetic Standards

In the intelligent era, the proliferation of smart media devices—including computers, mobile phones, smart tablets, and smart wearables—has increased both the number of individuals connected to the internet and the per capita ownership of smart devices. This provides the necessary historical backdrop for the rise and popularity of short videos and creates important development opportunities for their production and dissemination. Compared to the era of text and the era of image-reading, the visual landscape created by short videos can contain more symbolic meaning, is more easily accepted by audiences, and can accomplish more complex aesthetic expression. Particularly distinct from the content production and dissemination methods of radio and television, short video creation is more convenient, and its dissemination is more targeted and timely, making aesthetic standards no longer relatively uniform or static.

On one hand, in constructing this visual landscape, people have more opportunities to use smart media devices to produce and disseminate short video works, enabling everyone to become a creator of aesthetic objects [5]. Many short video platforms, building upon existing creation templates or modules, provide creators with more open interfaces to encourage more diversified creative activities. For example, the leading short video platform Douyin (TikTok) has established an open platform offering data services, special effects services, mini-program platforms, and store integration, allowing short videos to carry not only video symbols themselves but also to interconnect social scenes and involve more aesthetic object creators. This makes aesthetic standards no longer defined by a single individual, group, platform, or media institution, but rather more decentralized, thereby enabling the possibility of diversified aesthetic standards.

On the other hand, the emergence of big data technology and algorithmic recommendation means that short video audiences no longer receive relatively homogeneous media content like traditional media audiences. Instead, they can more accurately locate their preferred content through computation and discrimination [6]. The themes, content selection, forms, styles, and features of short videos that each individual receives are not identical, and every aesthetic subject can select and evaluate aesthetic objects according to their own aesthetic standards. This encourages the development of diversified aesthetic standards and accommodates more aesthetic possibilities.

2.2 Virtuality of Aesthetic Characteristics

The digital media production and dissemination methods that short videos rely on determine the virtuality of their aesthetic characteristics. This virtuality has two dimensions. First, it refers to the contrast with the authenticity of the objective world. Short videos encode information symbols through media means and transmit them across different platforms to reach audiences. Although much content is encoded through authentic documentation of the objective world or processed from existing visual materials, the selection of what to encode and process inevitably reflects the aesthetic influences of creators and disseminators. Especially as short videos have become important visual landscapes, they inevitably involve deliberate information processing and artificial screening to achieve specific goals. This intentional landscape construction, compared to traditional visual landscapes, uses brief video duration, fast-paced production and dissemination, more prominent dramatic nodes, and strong visual impact to create an oppressive viewing rhythm. This not only prevents audiences from deeply contemplating aesthetic objects to recognize their virtual nature but also makes them more likely to firmly believe in these artificially created visual landscapes and even become deeply immersed. For example, many emotional short video accounts focus on documenting sweet romantic relationships, which appear to be natural emotional records but often require scriptwriting, repeated filming, and meticulous post-production before release. This pseudo-documentary style of lifestyle short videos creates a sense of virtual authenticity, leading many audiences to believe that “what you see is what you get” and that this must be real life itself, when in fact they have fallen into the virtual realm constructed by the visual landscape [7].

The second dimension of virtuality refers to short videos’ ability to create a strong sense of virtual presence for audiences. Short videos enable audiences to quickly and easily access desired content, whether through active searching or passive push notifications based on big data and algorithmic technologies. This allows people to instantly learn about any event happening in the world and quickly enter into the so-called objective life shared by others. By watching short videos, audiences can break through temporal and spatial limitations to immediately satisfy their aesthetic needs. Many people can experience lifestyles they have never lived and emotions they have never felt through short videos. In participating in comments, forwarding, and liking, they can deeply engage in direct communication and interaction with creators and other individuals connected through virtual network platforms. Consequently, short video audiences can establish a strong sense of virtual presence through observation, connection, and interaction, obtaining authentic emotional experiences similar to those stimulated in real life. For instance, Douyin blogger “Tiantian’ s Day After Day” creates short videos documenting humorous snippets of his daughter Tiantian’ s growth and family life, using a “cloud parenting” creative approach that allows audiences to participate in the family life constructed by the account. Many audiences, as “most familiar strangers,” witness and accompany Tiantian’ s joyful

growth, creating an extremely strong sense of virtual presence.

2.3 Technological Nature of Aesthetic Approaches

Technology and aesthetics have traditionally been understood as two distinct research domains, yet they simultaneously maintain a relationship of mutual integration and support [8]. On one hand, technological development enriches aesthetic content, diversifies aesthetic approaches, and enhances aesthetic experiences. On the other hand, technological progress is guided by human consciousness, which is inevitably driven by aesthetic forces, making aesthetics an important impetus for technological development. Before the arrival of the intelligent era, the connection between aesthetics and technology was indirect at best. However, the popularization of intelligent media has made technological nature an essential characteristic of aesthetic approaches, signifying a historic shift in aesthetic connotation. For short videos—an aesthetic object born from and developed through intelligent media—the construction of their visual landscape inevitably carries a technological core, making the technological nature of aesthetic approaches a necessity.

Short videos integrate the characteristics of both traditional and new visual arts while fully demonstrating revolutionary changes in aesthetic approaches. Traditionally, aesthetic objects might stimulate different aesthetic experiences in different aesthetic subjects, but the content and form remained unchanged. For example, when audiences appreciate a film, they complete the aesthetic process through relatively fixed methods, stimulating different aesthetic experiences without altering the film's content or form. However, short videos differ from traditional visual landscape construction. They not only serve as objects of aesthetic appreciation that stimulate aesthetic experiences but also enable audiences to participate in the creation of aesthetic objects through digital technology for reprocessing and redistribution, completing multi-dimensional creation and aesthetic appreciation. Many short video platforms establish functions for “video duets” and “topic creation,” allowing every viewer to become a creator participating in the aesthetic creation process while appreciating others' content. Alternatively, audiences can deeply engage in sharing aesthetic experiences through comments, likes, and messages, or complete rapid aesthetic screening by simply swiping videos away. All these features stem from the development of digital media technology, which has endowed aesthetic approaches with technological nature [9].

3. Conclusion

In the intelligent era context, smart technologies represented by media convergence, virtual reality, augmented reality, big data, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic recommendation have permeated the entire chain of information collection, content production and distribution, and audience interaction. While vigorously promoting the vigorous growth of online literature and art, these technologies not only reconstruct the visual cultural landscape of short videos

but also generate important changes in their aesthetic culture, such as the multiplicity of aesthetic standards, the virtuality of aesthetic characteristics, and the technological nature of aesthetic approaches. Audiences' aesthetic feelings, emotional states, rational judgments, artistic needs, and visual cultural contexts are comprehensively perceived and datafied. However, behind the development of short videos lie a series of problems, including the surge in Chinese short video works but low rate of high-quality content; the simplistic “networking” of traditional video art; the lack of cultural meaning in creation; low aesthetic value and aesthetic conformity issues; insufficient innovation; and shortage of creative talent. These issues still require re-examining short video aesthetics in the context of the intelligent era and the characteristics of short video visual landscape construction.

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- Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

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