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Perceptual Time Difference Across Media: The Contemporary Mirror of the Aesthetics of Ode to the Red Cliff

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Abstract. Contemporary aesthetic experience presents two paths: one is "micro-media rumination" carried out through recording behaviors, and the other is "physical and mental immersion" in photography-prohibited venues. Combining Zong-qi Cai's "Topic-Comment Syntax" with the concept of time and space in Ode to the Red Cliff, this paper discusses the formation mechanism of "perceptual time difference". Recording behaviors often extend aesthetic experience from on-site perception to post-event review, while photography-prohibited spaces reduce the intervention of technical intermediaries, making it easier for subjects to enter an immediate aesthetic state. This paper argues that this time difference does not mean a decline in perceptual ability, but reflects the efforts of modern subjects to re-pursue the aesthetic experience of "the endlessness of things and self" in the digital media environment.

Keywords: *Ode to the Red Cliff*, Topic-Comment Syntax, perceptual time difference, aesthetic immersion, micro-media rumination

1. Introduction

The daily aesthetic activities of contemporary urban youth often present two representative perceptual forms. First, in scenic spots or exhibition venues where photography is allowed, subjects usually pick up smart devices to take photos first, and the truly delicate sensory experience is postponed to the process of post-event review, thus forming "micro-media rumination". Second, in drama theaters or cinemas where photography is strictly prohibited, audiences lose the technical buffer and can only directly bear the impact of light, shadow, sound and emotion with their bodies, so they are more likely to enter a state of "aesthetic immersion" where they forget themselves and the external world.

Many cultural critics attribute this difference to the alienation of perceptual experience by digital technology, arguing that media training dulls human senses. However, this view is not comprehensive. Modern people still retain the ability to feel beauty. It is not that the perceptual function has degenerated, but that the temporal structure of aesthetic experience has been restructured: the intervention or withdrawal of technical intermediaries leads subjects to delayed rumination or immediate immersion — this phenomenon is called "perceptual time difference" in this paper.

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To explore the causes of this time difference, this study will obtain theoretical resources from the life philosophy of Chinese classical poetics. Su Shi's *Ode to the Red Cliff* discusses the relationship between the passage of time and existence through the dialectic between "a moment" and "endlessness" [1]; Zong-qi Cai's "Topic-Comment Syntax" points out how subjects faced objective things with an almost synchronic grammatical structure in ancient society without video recording [2].

Based on the above discussion, this paper compares the linear control logic of SVO structure in digital media with the opening mechanism of classical poetic realm. The paper intends to show that "perceptual time difference" in the cross-media context is not a decline in the physiological perceptual ability of modern people, but a response in which they actively adjust and strive for perceptual initiative in the digital technology environment. Both post-event rumination and on-site immersion reflect the attempts of modern subjects to reconstruct the aesthetic experience of "the endlessness of things and self".

2. Linear mediation and topic-comment openness: the grammatical mechanism of time difference generation

Media not only transmit information, but also shape the way subjects perceive the world. When modern people raise smart devices to take photos at aesthetic sites, what they experience is not only a recording behavior, but also a change in perceptual stance. To understand how "perceptual time difference" is formed, it is necessary to compare the grammatical differences between technical logic and natural openness.

2.1. SVO grammar and the construction of cognitive distance

Taking photos with a smartphone is actually the operation of the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) cognitive structure in the process. When the lens is aimed at the object, the subject no longer simply immerses in perception, but transforms the flowing aesthetic experience into storable and repeatedly viewable digital images at the moment of shooting. This operation tends to objectify the open perceptual process and also draws the boundary between the subject and the object. The instrumental rationality of visual media tends to present the world as capturable and storable objects, thus deepening the cognitive path of subject-object dichotomy [3].

In this process, "atmosphere" is cut into discrete visual elements by the viewfinder [4]. At the moment of pressing the shutter, the subject also detaches their own experience from the present time and space, turning into an observer and possessor. SVO logic thus creates a cognitive distance between the subject and the world, making it difficult for aesthetic experience to be completed on site and instead relying on post-event review — "perceptual time difference" is thus generated.

2.2. Topic-comment suspension and synchronic presence

Different from the objectification logic of modern visual media, Chinese classical poetics provides another way to perceive the world. In his cross-context poetics research, Zong-qi Cai proposed "Topic-Comment Sentences" to summarize the unique expressive structure of Chinese poetry. Compared with SVO sentences that emphasize logical subjects, "Topic-Comment Syntax" pays more attention to presenting objects and appropriately weakens the central position of the subject, thus providing an expressive space for the aesthetic experience of the integration of mind and matter.

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The situation in *Ode to the Red Cliff* fully embodies this perceptual structure. "The clear breeze over the river and the bright moon among the mountains" are not objects to be analyzed or possessed. When they are presented to the subject, their primary role is the background and theme for the unfolding of aesthetic experience; the subsequent "when the ears catch it, it becomes sound; when the eyes meet it, it becomes color" is the subject's immediate perception and response to this theme. From "clear breeze" and "bright moon" to "caught by ears" and "met by eyes", aesthetic experience is built on the direct contact between senses and the external world, rather than an objectified cognitive process. As a result, the boundary between the subject and the object is weakened, and an experiential state of harmony between mind and matter emerges in the poetic realm. This grammatical mechanism, which abandons linear possessiveness and allows aesthetic objects to have a direct impact on the subject, is the classical code for achieving time-free "aesthetic immersion".

3. Obsession and delay: the digital compensation of micro-media rumination

The interruption of aesthetic intuition by technical intermediaries is not the end, but changes the way experience is generated. When immediate experience fails to fully unfold, subjects often turn to post-event review and comprehension. "Micro-media rumination" is precisely produced in this process.

3.1. The freezing of the moment and the absence of presence

When the subject raises a mobile phone to try to freeze the flowing scenery or artistic shock into a picture, this possessive action often weakens the original open and purposeless aesthetic gaze.

Paul Virilio pointed out in his discussion of visual machines that the "capturing" ability given to humans by technology often brings changes in perceptual modes [5]. At the moment of taking photos with smart devices, most of the subject's attention is transferred to the operation of the device and the composition in the viewfinder. Aesthetic experience is thus compressed: although the subject preserves the image of the object, they may not deeply experience its generation process. However, these digital images are not mere records; they will gradually transform into media that awaken memories and emotions, leaving a gap for subsequent aesthetic rumination.

3.2. Belated suture and post-hoc rumination

After leaving the aesthetic site, the "micro-media rumination" triggered by digital images truly starts. Looking back at the photo album is not mechanical repetition, but re-understanding that aesthetic experience in a new temporal context.

In this delayed temporal structure, the subject temporarily puts aside the desire to control the present and also breaks free from the linear constraints of SVO grammar. Bernard Stiegler's concept of "tertiary retention" points out that external technical memory can become an important condition for subjects to reshape temporal experience [6]. Modern people reactivate emotional and sensory memories with the help of these micro-media images. Through rumination, subjects try to reconstruct the "ear-catching and eye-meeting" experience missed on site, so as to compensate for the perceptual time difference caused by technical intervention.

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4. Deprivation and timeliness: aesthetic immersion in photography-prohibited spaces

Different from the self-discipline brought by micro-media, photography prohibition rules may prompt perception to restart. When modern people enter drama theaters or cinemas where smart devices are prohibited, what they face is not only the constraint of viewing etiquette, but also an active stripping of technical intermediaries. It is in the context without technical buffer that subjects have the opportunity to regain the "timely" intuition that has long been obscured by the digital landscape.

4.1. The retreat of reason and embodied presence

The photography prohibition mechanism weakens the SVO-style control logic and makes subjects open to aesthetic objects again. After losing the shelter of technical intermediaries, the subject's habitual instrumental impulses of analysis, judgment and check-in are forced to retreat, replaced by the full awakening and takeover of the physical body. Faced with high-intensity artistic bombardment, the audience's breathing, muscles and neurons are directly exposed to sound and light stimulation. Just as Maurice Merleau-Ponty called for "presence", the body is not an accessory to knowledge, but the basic "mode of presence" through which perception establishes contact with the world. The subject achieves a decentralized embodied participation in the oppression and temptation of space [7].

This state reduces the sense of distance between the subject and the work. In the dim environment and surround sound of the theater, the audience often has no time to make continuous judgments and analyses, but relies more on the senses to make direct responses. With the concentration of attention, the trembling of the body and the fluctuation of emotions, the subject gradually indulges in the unfolding process of art. As a result, the sense of time is weakened, and the subject can obtain a strong on-site experience, thus entering a state of "aesthetic immersion" where they forget themselves and the external world.

This on-site perceptual experience is consistent with the aesthetic state described in *Ode to the Red Cliff* as "when the ears catch it, it becomes sound; when the eyes meet it, it becomes color". The subject no longer clings to recording and preserving the object, but directly invests in its presentation process. At this time, the significance of aesthetic experience lies not in the duration of time, but in whether the subject can establish a connection with the world in a limited moment. Meanwhile, this immediate immersion is not a rejection of "change", but a full acceptance of the present experience.

5. Transcending time difference: reconstructing the "endlessness of things and self" in the contemporary landscape

Aesthetic activities in the contemporary cross-media environment have not completely moved towards technological alienation. Whether it is post-event rumination with the help of images or immediate immersion in photography-prohibited spaces, although the two present different perceptual paths, they both point to the same direction: subjects trying to rebuild the connection between humans and the world. From this perspective, modern people have not abandoned aesthetic experience, but responded to the fracture of perceptual experience in new ways under the conditions of digital media.

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5.1. The same destination of dual-track perception

Hartmut Rosa believes that the crisis of modernity is manifested in the fracture of the resonance relationship between subjects and the world, and human aesthetic impulse is precisely to re-establish this vital connection [8]. In contrast, the dual-track perception of contemporary youth — the chewing of images after pressing the shutter is a post-event recognition initiated by subjects in the delayed time zone when they lose on-site resonance in the complicated environment and are unwilling to be completely deprived of experience; while the ecstasy of forgetting oneself in the theater is the immediate realization of the long-lost resonance state after subjects unload the technological burden. Both prove that modern people have not become one-dimensional technological vassals, but are taking an extremely active stance to regain the right to define their own perception in the cracks of technology.

5.2. The cross-border confirmation of "change and constancy"

The problems embodied in this perceptual compensation mechanism have been profoundly discussed in *Ode to the Red Cliff*. Faced with the circulation of "water and moon", Su Shi proposed two ways of observing the world: "from the perspective of change" and "from the perspective of constancy". The significance of *Ode to the Red Cliff* does not lie in denying "change" with "constancy", but in explaining that the two can coexist as dialectical sides. When modern subjects raise their mobile phones at aesthetic sites, it is not just out of the impulse to preserve or possess, but also related to their anxiety that beautiful things will eventually fade away. Whether it is the fleeting sunset, the short curtain call of a performance, or the irreproducible situational atmosphere, all make subjects aware of the existential situation that "heaven and earth cannot last even a moment". Recording behavior thus becomes a media practice for subjects to respond to "change".

However, digital images cannot truly preserve the object itself; what they preserve is only the trace of the subject's encounter with the object. It is in the subsequent repeated viewing and emotional rumination that images gradually break away from their recording function and transform into media for the continuation of aesthetic experience. What the subject repeatedly confirms is no longer a specific picture, but the inspiration itself that was once aroused. As a result, the technological stub becomes an opportunity to lead to "constancy": the changing object has gone away, but the aesthetic experience gains continuous vitality in constant return.

Those repeatedly viewed digital images and immersive experiences in the theater together show that the aesthetic relationship pointed to by "both things and myself are endless" will continue in the subject's repeated memories and experiences, and will not end with the disappearance of the object. As Li Zehou said, the transcendence of Chinese classical philosophy is not divorced from real life, but built on perceptual life experience [9]. In different media environments, subjects also continue and confirm this aesthetic experience in new ways.

6. Conclusion

The cross-media perceptual dislocation essentially reflects the difference in the occurrence time of aesthetic experience. This paper argues that although the intervention of micro-media delays the formation of immediate experience, it does not make aesthetic experience disappear; subjects can still reactivate the feelings at that time through repeated viewing of digital images. In contrast, the immersive experience in photography-prohibited spaces shows that when technical intermediaries temporarily withdraw, subjects may still regain the direct perception described in *Ode to the Red*

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Cliff as "ear-catching and eye-meeting". Thus, we can clarify a core conclusion: the "time difference" of senses in the digital age is by no means one-dimensional human materialization and numbness of functions; on the contrary, it is a dynamic defense and compensation mechanism spontaneously formed by modern subjects to resist nihilism and defend perceptual sovereignty in the gap between instrumental rationality and natural openness [10].

At the theoretical level, the concept of time and "Topic-Comment Syntax" in *Ode to the Red Cliff* still have explanatory power in the digital media era, which helps to expand the understanding of contemporary perceptual experience.

At the practical level, this paper also has certain enlightenment for the curation methods of cultural spaces and art exhibitions. Against the background that cultural and tourism activities and exhibition design increasingly attach importance to photo check-in and digital marketing, how organizers balance tourists' demand for recording with immersive experience is worthy of further consideration. For some art activities that emphasize on-site feeling, appropriately restricting technical intermediaries may help enhance the subject's sense of participation and gain. In this sense, the value of aesthetic activities lies not only in preserving objects, but also in establishing experiential connections between humans and the world, which also echoes the thinking of "both things and myself are endless" in *Ode to the Red Cliff*.

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