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On the Paradigm Reconstruction of "Original Works", "Space" and "Viewing" in VR Immersive Exhibitions

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Abstract. With the development of VR technology, immersive art exhibitions have gradually appeared and are now used to bring art closer to the people. This paper will not only present technical discussions and philosophical thoughts; it will also systematically investigate the VR immersive exhibition practices that have emerged under the new concept of art history. It puts forward a new concept of the "uniqueness of experience", the "immersion paradigm" and "participatory interaction", and based on the theoretical system of art history, integrates current research results in new media art with rich historical accumulation and profound theoretical foundation to construct a critical analysis model centered on the "history of questions". The research results provide some references for professional artists, designers and developers to go beyond the novelty of technology and create artworks that are both immersive and carry the wisdom of art history and humanism. The paper will also solve the problem of the "illusion of freedom" and the corresponding risk to contemplative values in advanced computational aesthetics by putting forward some theoretical ideas on artistic forms in the digital era.

Keywords: VR immersive art exhibition, The essence of art historical theory, Curating, Aesthetics

1. Introduction

The world today is changing rapidly; we have entered the Digital Era. With the start of this period, changes in society have inevitably led to changes in art. Over the past several decades, digital art has started to appear and explore in the world of contemporary art. Digital art is a new type of art that is based on digital technology, and thus, it has generated some problems at the level of theory, such as how to consider virtuality and reality in this new context, what makes a specific medium special, how to organise exhibitions and ensure the originalness of art, what problems are encountered in the production of digital art for profit, and so on. With the development of technology and changes in the culture of art, digital art is constantly changing [1]. There are changes and stability in the world; thus, we must know both the trend and the eternal values of art. With the development of digital art, technology and art have gradually worked together to create new forms; even now, there are some outstanding virtual reality immersive art exhibitions that connect with people. Currently, most of the research at present is on the implementation and use of technology; few studies have explored how new ideas will change teaching and learning.

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Most of the domestic research has focused on the details of VR exhibition projects and their technical construction and audience response. Taking the "Digital Yida: Journey of Original Aspirations" of the Shanghai Theatre Academy and the digital initiatives of the Palace Museum as examples, existing studies have accumulated a large amount of practical data, but most are at the level of empirical summary. Some scholars have been exploring how to use virtual reality to enhance the sense of presence and improve the effect of communication in museums. Zhang Xiaomin has used the theory of stories to investigate immersive communication and found that the narrative of a museum has shifted from being a fixed exhibition to a changing, participatory tale. Although the above studies have examined communication strategies, they have not been applied to the philosophy of art. Another type of research is the role of VR in revitalizing traditional culture, visual interpretation and the combination of cultural tourism with business operations; it is a practical approach, and art is also included within the general framework of the cultural industry.

Although domestic research has provided a large number of local cases and practical experience from various angles - including technology application and case studies, museology and communication studies, cultural interpretation, industrial analysis, etc. - it has not yet formed a systematic critique of the phenomenon of VR immersive art at the level of art philosophy and intellectual history.

At present, the level of foreign research is relatively higher than that at home. Oliver Grau and other scholars have traced the history of immersive media back to the Pompeian murals, Renaissance optical illusions and the tradition of panoramic paintings in the 19th century. The above research provides the history of VR and shows that people have long desired immersion, but it does not address how new technologies have changed this desire recently. Foreign scholars have paid more attention to the psychological effects of "immersion", "embodiment" and "flow" in VR experiences and made some progress in understanding the mechanisms of experience, but they may be reducing artistic experience to quantitative indicators and ignoring cultural and social aspects. Critical Cultural Studies: Recently, an increasing number of critical views have been applied to immersive exhibitions in the background of the "attention economy" and the "experience economy", arguing that they have become "check-in" spots driven by social media and have lost their original artistic depth for the sake of visual effects. Other research has been conducted to see if virtual reality can provide a different kind of experience for traditional art.

Generally speaking, although foreign research has established theories and put forward many criticisms, it has not systematically explored or deeply investigated how VR alters the basic ideas of art theory.

This paper believes that VR immersive exhibitions are not just a new way of presenting exhibition works, but also a fundamental problem and a change in the history of art and aesthetics. Based on the three main ideas of "original work", "space" and "viewing", theoretical analysis and case studies have been conducted to show that VR environments alter the "aura" of artworks by moving the source of authority from physical objects to a "unique experiential quality" that is built by algorithms, interaction and narrative; they transform the linear and static space of the Renaissance into an "embodied field" for active participation by viewers; and they change the passive and disciplining "gaze" of traditional museums into an active and creative "participatory gaze". Therefore, this paper aims to construct a theoretical system for understanding artistic forms in the digital age and raise an alarm about the possible erosion of contemplative and meditative values due to the development of technology.

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2. The shift in visual quality: the dissolution of the "original work" and the emergence of a "new spiritual charm"

According to the concept of "aura" put forward by Walter Benjamin in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, the "original" status of artworks in traditional aesthetics is one of the original. Originally, the German word "Aura" meant "aura" or "atmosphere", and Benjamin was referring to the specialness and sacredness of traditional works of art – that very aura is fading in the era of mechanical reproduction. Aura is the sense of the work's genuineness; it is an in-person experience that is distant. The above were the attributes of pre-mechanical-reproduction works, that is to say, they could not be reproduced [2].

This "aura" comes from the special "nature of the present time and place" of the work - that is to say, it is a single material object in a particular historical and spatial environment. The aura is the distinctness of an artistic work in the presence of others, that is to say, the effect that a work has upon us. The value of an original work of art is not just about its age or the fame of the artist; rather, it is the unique existence of this work in a particular time and space, containing the history of having "been there" and directly encountering us at this very moment. This is the trait of being non-reproducible. However, the appearance of VR technology will also be an erosion of this authority based on the physical world.

Looking at the present, we may reconsider Benjamin's idea of the "disappearance of aura". The very nature of the "aura" is multifaceted, and therefore its disappearance is not only about the weakening of art's "immediacy and immediacy" due to reproductive technology and changes in the mode of perception of the aesthetic subject. There are other reasons for that. The technology of mechanical reproduction is used for mass production of works of art, thereby reducing the specialness and prestige of traditional works of art and eliminating the separation between the subject and object caused by "adoration value" [3].

There are two reasons for this drop. Benjamin was optimistic that the technology of reproduction would make art more accessible to all and thus achieve its goal of spreading democracy. As a mass medium, films have stirred the public's consciousness and promoted revolution. He also pointed out the problems: fascism used reproductive technology to change people's concepts of beauty and politicise it. Nowadays, the loss of the spiritual atmosphere can be regarded as a symptom of the problems in modern society; although technological development has freed art, it has also distanced people from life.

Replication technology does not copy the original; rather, it also has many copies. Artworks are no longer hung on the walls or displayed in exhibition halls; they are still there but intangible. In the work "Encountering Dongpo", people now regard algorithmically generated digital pictures as the original calligraphy of Su Shi. The work no longer has a fixed place and time, and it can be enjoyed in a distributed way via VR. But does it mean that there is no "spiritual resonance" anymore? VR will not solve this problem, but rather change the rules of the game. A new kind of "resonance" has begun to appear in the digital world of Virtual Reality. To digitise the sense of resonance mentioned above in a new way, fluid visuals, dynamic brushstrokes, rich colours and captivating stories can be used; it is now known as the "uniqueness of the experience", and although VR images can be reproduced repeatedly, the interactive journey of each user is never the same. Now, this authority is not about a lack of resources but rather algorithmic interpretation and narrative design wisdom. The original object is no longer admired; instead, people want to feel a sense of being when in touch with it. It can be seen that "distance and resonance" are not caused by the media or technology. Resonance includes the attribute of aesthetic reception; it is a special aesthetic experience that

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attracts one's full attention, or on the contrary, only in this state of concentration can one feel the "resonance" of a work. "Spiritual Charm" is a "fantasy of time unfolding", and people are drawn to this perceived object and emotionally moved by it.

3. The evolution of viewing perspectives: from "window" to "world"

If the "original work" refers to the material attributes of art, then "space" is about its visual characteristics. Irving Panofsky's "Perspective as a Symbolic Form" [4] proposed the concept of "space" and referred to the visual structural method in painting that is used to create depth and composition. Perspective is used to present objects, and at the same time, it is a way of looking; thus, both the observer and the observed are included in the structure of perspective. A common reference is available to help us study the history of art. Seeing precedes language, and it is a more dynamic and general way of knowing the world. With the development of media technology, changes in the structure of viewing have led to alterations in what is watched, how it is watched, and in what way, which has affected both the power relationships among viewers and the sense of self these viewers build [5]. The Spatial structure of works of art is linked to the way people experience them, so art does not exist independently as an object to be observed but is an event of perception that can be appreciated through observation.

Therefore, regarding iconography that is not related to spiritual ideas, "linear perspective" has formed its own independent and stable external physical geometric space since the Renaissance. Thus, the spatial mechanism has fixed the work of art into a stable picture that will always present us with an "outsider's" view of order from a distance. Therefore, the theory of Renaissance painting first transformed the "window" from an architectural component into a culture technology. A window is a deep-seated human need to observe the world outside; at the same time, it is an aperture for the room to receive light and view the outside world. The window is a combination of two- and three-dimensional forms; although it has a volume and can contain people's breath, thoughts and activities, it is shown in a two-dimensional way and frames the distant mountains and floating clouds. Thus, the window is a metaphor for the window of humanity's ability to make a way out of limitations. With the change of times in media, the dual nature of the window as both a surface and an opening has been repeatedly expressed in various visual forms. Finally, this paradox is resolved by digital interfaces; they have extended the metaphorical function of the window and finally achieved integration through a combination of "window" and "plane". Digital interfaces can use the perspective metaphor of the window and, based on this spatial paradox, develop new operational logics [6], so at present, the audience agency of modern and contemporary art has reached a new height. The privatisation of media technology has promoted the trend of atomisation in individual life, and the practice of sharing media with specific groups at certain times and places has gradually been replaced by personalised media use enabled by media lightweighting and mobility, which is a type of use that is highly autonomous and independent of specific usage scenarios or relationships. Changes in the ways audiences consume and participate in works with productive features have led to profound changes in the concept of the "active audience", and now this concept is widely used to study the structural attributes of audiences in the digital age. With the rise of virtual reality technology, this "window" has been completely broken; now, the view of pictures is more active, and one can even experience a sense of being there.

First, VR is not a fixed viewpoint. In the traditional way, the sight of visitors in museums is limited by their own body and the arrangement of artworks; they can only see from one spot. In the VR project "How Did Civilization Emerge?", however, visitors can get a whole-picture look at the Erlitou Palace complex and feel its majestic scale, as well as study the fine carvings on the jade cong

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in detail, or view various items from all sides. It is not restricted by the rules of linear perspective; thus, we have gained new ways to look at life from different angles.

Secondly, VR can create an "embodied space" that is not a fixed background but rather changes according to the movement of people, such as in the teamLab work *No Boundaries*. For example, when people move, there will be changing light and shadow effects; touching the virtual flowers can make them disappear and then reappear - such alterations directly impact the space of sight and the tempo of the story. It is no longer an object to be viewed but a living space that needs to be experienced through active life; it has become a place where one's body and environment interact, and the division between observer and observed is broken.

VR technology is also in a state of time; it can extend the time of space. Unlike the fixed view of traditional perspective, VR environments can also show different times of day and night, seasons, history, etc., to increase the sense of presence. Therefore, the fixed visual model of traditional perspective can no longer be used in the field of immersive environments. From a "window" to a "world", there has been a change in both the way people view things and a rise in their initiative; that is to say, one who used to simply watch can now create on his own and has set new limits for art and technology. The Spatial reconstruction can enhance the senses of sight and other feelings, provide an easy starting point for studying how to spread a certain mood in movies, etc.

4. The transfer of viewing power: from "discipline" to "participation"

After studying the concepts of "original work" and "space", we have focused our final analysis on how the subject of "viewing" has been transformed, and Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish* [7], shows that museums are essentially disciplinary spaces. Under the invisible power of authority, people are forced to be silent, avoid close contact with others, and follow all the rules strictly. The ideal of art museums is to show the clear, ordered and well-known history of human art. Therefore, museums select some works of art that are not in their original functional or cultural contexts and display them for people to observe and reflect on. It is to determine what can be regarded as an artwork and, at the same time, implicitly promote the idea of aesthetic contemplation. Visitors are introduced to the way of appreciation and interpretation for art, focused on its aesthetic value, and may not know that it was originally a part of culture or life. Therefore, art museums are no longer just places to house collections and organise exhibitions; they have also become cultural systems that present ideas about art and art history, help us understand what meets the definition of "art", construct a historical narrative for this history, and shape the cultural identity and aesthetic perception of the people [8]. The famous aesthete Benedict referred to museums as "disciplinary machines" and created new scenes for cultural works that serve as technical environments to promote the construction of cultural artifacts in accordance with the government's plan to reshape the norms of social behaviour. He mentioned that in museums, artefacts are always sorted out according to so-called "scientific" or "objective" reasons, and whether these reasons are based on the development of history, scientific reason or anthropological analysis concepts is unknown. He found that the three main positions were created by museums and art galleries. The first are the patrons of these institutions. They are the people who are in charge of museum and gallery policies and support; they are all middle-class white men. The source of their social standing is both their own claims to expertise and the general discourse of capitalism, patriarchy, racism, etc. Theories show that we, the free-roaming visitors of museums, are in fact components of a well-organized system.

Virtual Reality Technology has changed people's experience of life by creating new worlds. Instead of simply viewing the relics in a display case, through digital reconstruction, virtual tours, interactive exhibitions and other means, more people will better understand their history and culture.

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It can be used to explore distant ancient buildings, lost structures and precious items in other places without needing to go there in person. It presents the traditional culture in a lively way and is free from the restrictions of time and space. When people wear a VR headset, they can no longer be disturbed by the distractions of the real world; it is a private sensory world free from external noise, phone notifications and light from the environment, and can fully immerse themselves in the virtual world and experience a sense of "presence". More importantly, VR can give people the power to "interact" and engage actively, not just view. In the case of a VR experience, such as the "Forbidden City: The Emperor's Palace" at the Palace Museum, people will be more than just observers; they will also be active "coders". They can walk through the gates of the Forbidden City, get closer to the artifacts, choose different routes in the story by looking around, and even talk to virtual characters in a historical setting. The model of "participatory interaction" no longer needs to be in the traditional direction of "display-reception", and it should be an active creation by the audience. Through interaction, viewers can choose how many times, how fast to watch and what to focus on; they form their own story lines and ways of thinking. Technology now provides more than just the presentation of content; it is an interactive way to enable users to decide themselves how, what, and to what extent they want to engage with that content. Therefore, the viewer no longer stands passively outside the picture but becomes a member of the narrative who is able to change the development of that story through choices and give it new life. Therefore, there is a significant change in the position of the audience; they no longer merely consume art but are now active participants who can even create works themselves.

Mark Post once said that with the replacement of traditional physical media by digital media, artists are no longer genuine subjects of art. Instead, there are network participants who do not have the restrictions of traditional identities, and they are constantly changing. The first kind of creation in art will change; it will no longer be about making a specific plan with the will. Art's audience will be less about watching and more about participating actively in daily life. The basic elements of art are both subjective experience and other content. Now the components are no longer only people and nature or humanised virtual spaces, but also intelligent organisms and high-tech robots that have been created. Thus, it seems that viewers move from the outside world into the inner world of artworks and gradually become immersed in the experience of art; in a way, they become subjects of art themselves. We should still pay attention to prevent artists' loss of artistic subjectivity and the reduction of artists to mere craftspeople in VR; at the same time, art scholars should continue to remind creators to cherish the value of art.

5. Critique and reflection: being alert to aesthetic alienation in the "experience economy"

Although VR technology has led to the above changes in patterns, we should not lose our critical judgment and caution.

The Illusion of "Freedom": Does the "Participatory Gaze" Truly Free the Public, or is it only a "Conferred Liberty"? VR gives people the sense of freedom in the game, but it is actually controlled by a program. What seems to be free exploration is actually restricted choice within the paths created by developers. Now that we live in the digital age, all our clicks, pauses and other activities when using search engines, social media or online shopping sites are being monitored and analysed. Based on the above data, an algorithm can construct an interest model to predict the interests of users and then recommend related content to them. Although this personalised service is very convenient, it is actually a kind of digital enclosure; surrounded by our own interests and choices, we are increasingly shut off from various other views. Algorithms have constantly reinforced the existing biases and made us feel at ease; as a result, what we are now calling a "filter bubble" and

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"echo chamber effect" has developed. Scholars have observed that algorithmic recommendations are a type of "internalised, pervasive power dynamic that penetrates all parts of people's lives and social functions and can guide the public and social organizations". Furthermore, when combined with VR art exhibitions, these algorithms work with high precision and subtlety, and we have barely noticed that we are being controlled. Art itself is now under the control of new capital—the "experience economy"—and we have been given only "virtual" freedom by big data algorithms.

To address the capital logic and platform dominance of the "experience economy", "meditative resistance" may be a way of expression. As shown above, with the development of VR technology, the value of contemplation is declining; that is, the aesthetic distance between the subject of art and the object will move from distance to closeness and finally disappear. Benjamin's idea of the "aura" has declined since the time of machine reproduction and is now gone. Based on Benjamin's ideas, the scattering of time, space and society in the digital era has damaged people's sense of beauty, and thus, the mystical atmosphere among works of art has diminished [9]. Along with the attenuation of spiritual appeal due to the experience economy, attention should be paid to contemplation; therefore, during a VR experience, one must consciously keep a distance from the artwork and maintain the power of reflection, resist overly absorbing sensory stimulation, and make critical inquiries into the links between works, algorithms and capital. Thus, one can choose not to be guided by algorithmic aesthetic norms, actively explore all kinds of art that move people, break out of filter bubbles, and find new sources of inspiration in life and emotions that run counter to the flow of capital-driven instant consumption. It is not the abandonment of technology but rather a re-establishment of the independence of art in the context of technology-enhanced art; that is to say, art recipients should no longer be passive "experience consumers" but active "reflective participants". Through deep aesthetic thought, we can resist the aesthetic alienation caused by the experience economy, preserve the true value of art as a carrier of spirit, and prevent it from becoming merely a commodity symbol driven by capital interests.

6. Conclusion

The lack of connection between technological exploration and humanistic reflection will be the focus of this paper, and it will explore the development trends of VR immersive exhibition practice in art history in depth. It proposes a new interpretative system, such as the "singularity of experience", the "immersion model" and "participation in art", which is based on the special perspective of art historical theory; thus, it has enriched the historical basis and theoretical system for research in new media art and laid the foundation for critical analysis. Art historians should be involved in curation and creation, rather than just supplying "traditional resources" for technology; they need to use their deep historical knowledge and theoretical insights to promote the development of art beyond the level of technique and tackle serious problems. For example, curated VR exhibitions should not be simple reconstructions of artifacts; they should make people think about the various ways in which history is narrated, how memories are formed, and what exactly "reality" and "virtual reality" are. Amid the continuous development of technology, the discipline of art history must continue to seek out the "depth", "critique", and "humanistic core" of art.

Although VR technology has not reached maturity yet, it will be able to offer new forms of art in the future and has many prospects. Modern VR Art is very similar to early cinema. Before the appearance of cinematic language and montage techniques, films were merely called "moving pictures" or "live recordings of stage performances"; from natural minerals to synthetic pigments, from clay sculptures to 3D printing, from oil and ink paintings to the dynamic interplay of light and shadow in the VR world, the narrative of art is also a story of continuous technological evolution

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[10]. Although VR technology has been developed, new creative and perception opportunities have been opened up; however, there is also the risk of losing historical depth and critical distance. At present, the purpose of art history is to use a broad scope of history and advanced theoretical tools to find new forms of connection in all areas of changes and offer critical guidance to contemporary society.

In immersion, we should not forget contemplation; through interaction, we can learn about discipline; and at the time of spiritual rebirth, we will collectively realize that contemplation is still needed in the art of the digital age.

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