

On Cultural Transmutation and Aesthetic Turn in the Age of Consumerism

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Abstract The strong intervention of technology and the market in the field of culture shows a noticeable trend of generalization across culture and aesthetics in the present era, which is performed by the rise of popular culture and the transformation of daily life aestheticization. In the face of this profound wave of secularization and widespread democratization, the supremacy of high culture and the disciplinary vision of traditional studies are under strong attack, and the traditional methods of creation and aesthetic criticism of classical art no longer apply to the emerging mass culture or mass art. From the aesthetics of classical art to the aesthetics of pleasure that focus on bodily sensations and physiological desires, from the “human” voice of classical art to the popular experience of contemporary culture. From the literal imagery of classical art to the image reproduction of popular culture, from the conceptual illusion of classical art to the physical comedy of popular culture. Classic aesthetics has rapidly entered its contemporary transformation and reality reconstruction. Its cultural standpoint and theoretical horizon have made a comprehensive adjustment.

Keywords pan-aesthetics; pleasure experience; classical art; mass culture; classical aesthetics

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Introduction

Although people like Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno have written off mass culture as a worthless part of the cultural industry, it is an indisputable fact that the cultural industry has flourished in the developed countries for nearly a century. The cultural industry uses mass media to create physical fantasies, provide playful psychological experiences, overcome identity anxiety, and enrich the cultural life of the public in a broader sense; it might be fashionable and kitsch, but cultural consumers have embraced it. Therefore, the development of mass culture in the consumer society is inevitable.

Supported by the ever-rising technological rationality, human society has made great strides in material civilization, which has led to an unprecedented burst of self-confidence. The progress of technology and pervasiveness of market logic have caused the earlier humble human beings to proclaim “the death of God,” “the death of man” and “the death of the author” one after another, and to constantly discuss “the end of religion,” “the end of philosophy” and “the end of art,” turning over every spiritual icon on high to the ground. In the face of this profound secularization and widespread democratization, the supremacy of high culture and the disciplinary perspective of traditional studies have been strongly impacted, and the traditional methods of creation and aesthetic criticism of classical art no longer apply to the emerging mass culture or mass art. The strong intervention of technology and the market in the field of culture has led to a remarkable trend of generalization across culture and aesthetics in the present era.

Aesthetic Generalization: The Modern Variation of the Aesthetic Routinization

The aesthetic generalization firstly appears to be the enlargement of artistic scope. From the original poetry, painting, and music to the nine Muses who perform respective duties, from the traditional types of art to the new types of art, such as film, television, advertising, and performance art, culture has expanded its original, narrow and specific types of art, to all the spiritual and ideological realms of mankind, even the realm of pure desire; especially with the rise of popular culture, everyday life tends to be aestheticized, aesthetic modernity and aesthetic routinization—the former tension-filled pair of categories in classic aesthetics—

have shifted from opposition to harmony. What is more interesting is that the material utility and physiological pleasure that classic aesthetics has always denied and suppressed have become the representative and leader of beauty in the contemporary aesthetic context and aesthetic experience. In short, the extension and connotation of contemporary aesthetics have been significantly expanded and extended. Beauty has become pervasive and ceaseless in people's daily life. In the era of globalization, the economy has shown an evident trend of integration; the shallow material culture and industrial culture are showing the same tendency with the help of modern industrial high-tech and modern information high-tech. It is an undeniable reality.

As one of the cores of culture, the generalization of aesthetic culture is an irresistible trend. It is not only driven by the external environment, for example, but the "lifelike effect" under the intervention of high-tech makes the originally genius imagination become various alternatives of the desire abreaction and satisfaction of the real or virtual life. Moreover, there is also a sense of crisis that the aesthetic culture itself, especially the traditional aesthetic standpoint and experience, if it refuses adjustment and expansion, will withdraw from the criticism discourse field in the emerging art. Just as the 15th century Protestant Reformation that made daily mundane behaviors religious is an irresistible religion generalization, popular culture or aesthetic generalization is also a historical necessity that makes daily mundane behaviors aesthetically significant. In other words, similar to the Protestant Reformation, which is essentially a movement of secularization and routinization of the sacred religion, which makes people's life more rational and spirits free and liberated; this transformation of aesthetic generalization is in essence the routinization and popularization of elegant and specialized artistic aesthetics, it aims to get out of the narrow circle of classic aesthetic theories surrounds traditional elite art, and to better adapt to the new changes brought by the modern cultural life generalization, avoiding the invalidation of classic aesthetic discourse and the aphasia even absent of aesthetic criticism. This transformation of aesthetic generalization is a big wave in the tide of cultural generalization, and it is the aesthetic, theoretical answer to the increasingly culturalization of daily life. The new aesthetics which adjusted its vision has based on the aestheticization of daily life to provide a reasonable statement and explanation for the cultural changes in the new era and further refines the new aesthetic experience it contains, condensing it into the intrinsic driving force of human spiritual development, which is also the theoretical meeting point of humanities and arts and mass culture in the new era.

The current transformation of aesthetic generalization is comprehensive. From

the perspective of the research object, although the classic aesthetics which focus on high art are also concerned about the beauty of nature, the nature, on the whole, is emotionalized and aestheticized by people; the “virtue comparison theory” of traditional Chinese aesthetics and the “Project Theory” of the modern Western aesthetics are the proof of that. Hence classic aesthetics can also be referred as artistic aesthetics. Nonetheless, contemporary aesthetics focuses on a completely different point, and it emphasizes attention to daily life or cultural phenomenon in daily life, that is, popular culture, especially popular fashion. Therefore, fashion and clothing, interior decoration, advertising design, and even resort layouts that have never been shown in classic aesthetics have officially entered the research field of contemporary aesthetics. From the perspective of aesthetic form and aesthetic style, classic aesthetics regards tragedy in high art as high, comedy as low, and rejects burlesque. Its overall style is refined and elegant, tragic and solemn; it praises the beauty and sublime, even if it involves comedy art, it is most tragic comedy or contains tragic elements, the so-called “tearful laugh.” While contemporary aesthetics is dominated by informal and popular comedies, various sub-comedy arts and burlesques also have a broad cultural consumer market, and their overall style is plane, standard, relaxing and vivid. It accolades pleasure and economy: it firstly lays eyes on physiological pleasure experience instead of deep mental rejoicing and spiritual cleansing, the so-called “katharsis” effect; it no longer pursues the traditional artistic conception which is distant and intriguing, but focuses on the immediate cheerful response of the body and the saving of time and effort in consumption. Thus, current mass cultural products are mostly disposable, and their cultural consumption is often oriented to leisure and entertainment, mental stress relief, or desired release.

From the essence of aesthetics, classic aesthetics pays attention to aesthetic transcendence and the development of spiritual space. It regards tranquility, serenity, and peace of desireless and selflessness as the highest state, there to have the ancient saying of “quietness goes far.” Contemporary aesthetics, on the other hand, focuses on shallow psychological pleasure and self-satisfaction, and the so-called “individual” choices of emotionalization and the seemingly unconscious so-called “fits,” in short, it is based on the cheerful presentation of the body comedy. If the culturally nourishing environment of classic aesthetic concepts is the metaphysical questioning of existence which runs through from classical to modern time, with obvious religious compassion, then the culturally nourishing environment of contemporary aesthetic ideas represented by popular culture is the new religion of contemporary masses—pure consumerism philosophy supported by technologist

and materialism. From the cultivation of the beauty of classical art to the pleasing aesthetics that pays attention to physical feelings and desires, from the endorsement of “human” in classical art to the popular experience of contemporary culture, from the literal imagery of classical art to the image reproduction of contemporary culture, from the conceptual fantasy of classical art to the body comedy of popular culture, classical aesthetics quickly entered its contemporary transformation and reality reconstruction.

Based on the burgeoning modern high-tech, and controlled by strong capital that expands the market to earn greater profits, mass culture, permeated by a dramatic change in aesthetic interest, has completely reversed the metaphysical heaviness of human that have been inherited for thousands of years, and moved towards an attempt to individualize the experiential ease of the individual. The aesthetic generalization brought about by the rise of popular culture is both revolutionary at the level of preventing cultural fascism, which was praised by Walter Benjamin, and reactionary in the sense of spiritual degradation that Herbert Marcuse has reviled. Facing the generalization of aesthetics, most people have to experience unavoidable bewilderment and confusion: how much effect does classic aesthetic theory have in the transition from aesthetic culture to popular culture? And how to adjust it?

Reorientation of Pleasure: The Contemporary Change of Aesthetic Interest

Artists and aestheticians initially disdained and confronted the impact of technology from which modernism emerged in the late nineteenth century; the most fashionable fast-food art, decorative art, and consumer art of contemporary people are worthless to modernists. In the face of the impact of the market, the traditional attitudes of artists and aestheticians are antipathy and panic. Since the nineteenth century, when capitalism achieved the unification of the global market through colonial violence, the patronage system of traditional arts gradually disintegrated, artists were gradually professionalized, and their works had to rely on the power of merchants, compradors, and intermediaries to enter the market territory and obey its manipulation.

After more than a century of technological and market shocks, especially the high-tech and economic globalization since the 1970s, traditional art, high-tech and contemporary fashion have combined and derived, and many ideas of classical aesthetics have been radically shaken, arts and crafts, pop music, cartoon products, popular film and television dramas, various decorative fashion arts, body painting, performance arts, etc. are making a great clamor, the transmission and expression of

physical desires, the pursuit and implementation of utilitarian ideas are extremely heated. These are in sharp contrast to the clear-boundaries traditional arts and the graceful, sublime classical aesthetic concepts. Contemporary art has an obvious sub-variety and cross-variety character, and contemporary aesthetic concepts have also shifted from ultra-utilitarian and spiritual sublimation (purification) to meet people's everyday release of desire and chase of pleasure; shortness, flatness, and fashion have replaced infinite charm, distant mood, and unique personality. The main theme of aesthetics throughout the era, changed from the noble and solemn tragedy art to the humorous comic art; heavy metaphysics and exquisite, elegant aesthetic taste have become exclusive to a few elite thinkers and artists, the superficial physical enjoyment and body pleasure have become the cultural interest of most people.

Frankfurt School thinks that the pleasure generated by popular culture is nothing but a sugar-coated ideology, and our indulgence in sensory joy induces us to unconsciously succumb to ideological cognition violence. Benefiting from Bakhtin's "carnival" theory, the "pleasure" theory that appeared in the 1980s gave "pleasure" a completely different meaning: it regards pleasure as an important resource of the resistance to hierarchical order and authoritative control. But more importantly, it benefits from French thinker Roland Barthes' exposition of physical pleasure. According to Barthes, the body is a product of nature rather than of culture and it is detached from ideology, therefore it constitutes the last stronghold against cultural control; presumably that the body is separated from the subject constructed by ideology, then ideology is not all-pervasive, and the body provides us with a limited free space to resist ideology, physical pleasure then becomes the antithesis of ideology and has obvious positive significance. Based on this, Fiske, a well-known British culturalist scholar, concluded, "There have been many attempts to theorize the role of pleasure in culture; they vary immensely, but all share the desire to divide pleasure into two broad categories, one of which they applaud, and the other they deplore" (Fiske 16). From Fiske's point of view, this dichotomy is sometimes regarded as "aesthetic," that is, it is opposed to vulgar pleasures with elegant and noble pleasure; sometimes it is "political," that is, it is distinguished from revolutionary pleasure by rebellious pleasure; sometimes it is "discourse," that is, the sense of creative pleasure is different from the pleasure of accepting the stale definition; sometimes it is "psychological," that is, the mental pleasure and the physical pleasure; sometimes it is "rules," it is the pleasure of exerting power and the pleasure of evading power. Fiske noted, "I, too, wish to recognize that pleasures are multiple and can take contradictory forms, but I wish to concentrate on popular pleasures as

opposed to hegemonic ones, and thus to emphasize what is typically thought of as the more disreputable side of each antithesis” (Fiske 6). Based on a careful analysis of “pleasure,” Fiske divides pleasure into two types: one is evasive pleasure, which surrounds the body, it tends to cause offenses and vilifications in a social sense, and one is the pleasure brought by the production of various meanings, they are about social identity and social relations, and they operate in a social sense by resisting hegemonic powers in a semiotic sense. Fiske thinks that this classification is beneficial. He opposed the Frankfurt school’s general view of mass culture “From this point of view, mass culture is a standardized, formulaic, repetitive and superficial culture, one which celebrates trivial, sentimental, immediate and false pleasures at the expense of serious, intellectual, time-honored and authentic values” (Strinati 12).

Undoubtedly, the focus of classic aesthetics is on the spiritual level and spiritual world of human beings, and the pursuit of a transcendent promotion of human nature and a continuous improvement of the existing situation with a compassionate and solemn attitude; it researches the origin of beauty as beauty, and discusses the aesthetic category of grace and sublime, by “Animism” and “Virtue Comparing theory” to bring everything—nature, pure art, human society and daily life—into the human aesthetic vision, and classify them into human moral purification or spiritual ascension; it opposes non-harmony, non-equilibrium, and non-delicacy except tragedy and magnificence, and rejects the pursuit of physical happiness and utilitarianism beyond spiritual grief and solemnity for it believes that those will degenerate humanity and alienate the spirit, therefore, comedies that promote humor are always at the bottom in the discourse field of classic aesthetics, those emerging sub-comedy varieties—such as cross talks, sketches, comedies, New Year blockbuster, soap operas and etc.—are worthless, not to mention being researched as serious art.

The continuous improvement and rapid development of human production technology have continued to generalize the culture which exclusive to human beings, the achievements of human civilization have changed with each passing day. In the recent digital technology revolution, the high development of information technology and the full penetration of capitalism have promoted the complete generalization of human culture, and the main focus of human culture has also shifted from the ideological elite to the consumer mass, the material world is extremely rich yet unbalanced, the cultural influence is extremely broad yet superficial; industrial culture dominates the world with its oneness, many people are reduced to slaves of industrialization and marketization, and become spiritual vagrants with no thought, no opinion, and no personality driven by huge living pressure and fast fashion, im-

mersed in alternative and virtual satisfaction all day long and unable to extricate themselves. Frankfurt School's ideas are not all sensational, while it is impractical to resist and oppose them blindly as in a Don Quixote-style behavior, aesthetics reclusion, shown in romanticism and aestheticism in the nineteenth century, is more of an illusory, wishful thinking aesthetic Utopian. Only through careful and thorough analysis and dissection, and with critical guidance, will it be possible at the appropriate time to promote the transformation of the current "cultural industry," which has been alienated by capital, into "folk culture" that represents the masses, which in the true meaning is the culture of "mass." Therefore, the aesthetic redemption theory advocated by Adorno, Marcuse, and others has considerable value and reference significance. After all, the turning of aesthetic taste has become a reality, but the key question is: After the turning, the ideological elites have been completely marginalized, and they no longer have the right to control the direction of the development of aesthetic culture. So, who is at the helm of popular culture now?—It is the so-called "cultural economic man" and "economic cultural man" who obey the capital and the market. In the final analysis, it is the capital and the market. Therefore, there is a pair of main contradictions in people's minds about the contemporary mainstream culture: the confrontation between aestheticism and consumerism.

Mass Culture: Confrontation Between Aestheticism and Consumerism

The rise of popular culture has caused many new topics. Aestheticization of popular culture or aesthetic generalization is a revolution of daily aesthetics, and it is in nature a process of secularizing the sacred aesthetics and popularizing elegant art. Its main appearance is the culturalization and aestheticization of daily life; this is also the ideal that the ideological elites of all ages have been eager to achieve since the Enlightenment. Now, this ideal has been realized on the surface, but many serious problems are still rooted in the depths, especially the internal driving force of this change is derived from the control of market capital and technological civilization, rather than the top-down cultural awareness or aesthetics awareness of the masses which was expected by enlightenments of all ages. It is because of this deep-rooted disagreement that contemporary marginalized ideological elites spare no efforts to speak out despite changes in their status, attempting the impossible by insisting on criticizing the full-scale control of market capital and technological civilization on human society, exposing the "accommodation" and "kitsch" conspiracy in the production and marketing of popular culture, and resist the consumerist principles hidden in the development of popular culture; in the era of writing or making "for the chest and the lower body," when chanting desires and expressing utility as

frankly and nakedly as animals, the ideological elites still adhere to the standpoint of human sublimation and spiritual evolution by under aestheticism, oppose all form of human alienation and attempts to impress those who are accustomed to change the status quo and prevent the emergence of cultural consequences.

There is a fundamental difference between classic art and popular culture, that is, whether it is the emotional expression of the producer or the desired catharsis of the consumer that is the focus. The cultural concept of aestheticism is based on artists' self-subjectivity, so it emphasizes the free appearance of individual life experiences; while the cultural concept of popular culture is based on the consumers' interest choices, hence it emphasizes the most common life experience, such as sexual fantasy, etc., only in this way can it obtain the best market prospects. It is also in this sense that Horkheimer, Adorno, and others believe that mass culture is a way for the industrialized totalitarian society of capitalism to exert control over the mass's minds, and this control method eliminates doubts about the rationality of capitalist industrial society by satisfying material desires in a remarkable degree. Classic art, especially modernist art, which imaginatively surpassed the secular society, was appreciated by the thinkers of the Frankfurt School in resisting the objectification and one-sidedness of people in the consumer society.

Classical art is a discovery of meaning expressers when facing the world, while the meaning of popular culture is a kind of "endorsement" of expressers facing consumers. Therefore, the meaning of classic art arises from the relationship between the subject and the world and has a strong referentiality, while the meaning of popular culture arises from the relationship between the author and the consumer, tending to be an experiential or gaming experience. Aestheticism often engages in artistic activities with the concept of aesthetic salvation, so art is essential and immortal to them. Artistic activities are to reveal the original meaning of the world and even formulate a generally effective way of understanding and valuing principle for all people. This urge to create classics has filled elegant art with words about the meaning of the world, no matter whether the meaning is absurd or harmonious is of nothingness or primitive vitality, and no matter how this meaning makes the recipient feel obscure and unfamiliar, the words facing the earth always support the meaning production system of classic art. Mass culture does not care much about the national economy and people's livelihood; it refuses to assume the important task of speaking the earth. Its meaning does not come from reference but resonance, from the producer's endorsement for mass consumers. Mass culture does not need to explore the essence of cosmos and life, but only speculates on the trend of the cultural market, pondering the emotional desires of people in secular

society; mass culture should build a real stage or virtual space for consumers to vent their emotions or realize dreams. Therefore, whether it is philosophical essence truth or real-life truth, it does not make much sense to mass culture. For example, Camus' *Sisyphus Myth* uses the vain of the strong to inform people of his discovery of the world's meaning—absurdity, the Hollywood movie *Terminator* starring Schwarzenegger, weaves a false story for people to realize their desire for “the strength to punish evil and promote good.” The meaning of *Sisyphus Myth* is of Camus' deep reflection on the world, while the meaning of *Terminator* is of the “collusion” of the film production team and the audience.

As an institutional existence of popular culture, mass media such as television, cinema, radio, newspapers, karaoke, dance halls, etc. have prepared material premises for the development of popular culture, and its ultimate role is to make mass culture produced on the scale of the cultural industry and spread globally. As a result, the field of cultural sharing has been significantly expanded, and the barriers of traditional regional culture with boundaries of regions or ethnic groups have been dismantled on a large scale, providing the possibility of forming a modern world culture. Mass culture clearly positions itself as a commodity, is guided by market principles, and has been used by the masses for consumption, and therefore, mass culture instinctively tracks the masses' cultural consumption psychology and caters to the masses' consumer tastes. It has a certain degree of innovation and helpfulness: it replaces empty doctrines with shallow principles of commodity equality, participates in the daily life of the public with the relaxed principle after intense work, relieves the social tension with the principle of repressive consciousness release, and updates cultural products constantly with the principle of natural selection, so it is said that popular culture has its irreplaceable functions in modern society. However, compared with elegant art or elite culture, the market characteristics and commodity principles of popular culture determine its flatness and short-sightedness, and the pursuit of instant pleasure or instinct satisfaction becomes its mainstream. Restricted by the market logic, there is indeed a driving force in the pursuit of stylization, pasteurization, and mass production to obtain the maximum economic benefit in mass culture production; but when the consumer market becomes more sophisticated and the consumer psychology matures, there is also competitive creative driving force that is constrained by the law of natural elimination and focuses on maximizing consumer interest with innovation and uniqueness. This shows that the production of popular culture, in addition to being restricted by the market economy, is also potentially constrained by aesthetic laws and public interest at appropriate times.

Needless to say, the current mass culture production in mainland China is dominated by consumerism which is controlled by the market logic, the inner spirits of its products are almost lost, and only one appearance survived. Its commerciality from production to sales even includes the so-called after-sale services are no different from other unstable goods. It can be said that the commodity attribute of current popular culture occupies a dominant position, while the spiritual attribute is replaced by high-tech packaging and technological decoration. The level of mass culture in many regions is even more worrying, that short, plain, quick, and vulgar, pornographic products are pervasive, making the Chinese cultural industry, which relies much on the leading role of popular cultural products, clearly at a disadvantage. The development of the market, driven by competition, shows that popular culture itself can also produce an antidote and restrain consumerism from domination, because the creation of the cultural market requires the “appeal” under the support of “applause,” otherwise it will not last long. After the development of popular culture reached a certain extent, its internal changes just fit the aestheticists’ criticism of single-dimensional consumerism, the combination of internal and external forces promotes popular culture to increase spiritual capacity and reduce the possibility of human alienation. However, given the fact that the nature of market capital control has not been eliminated thoroughly, it is in vain to expect the market to purify itself, external impact and benign criticism still play a key role. So, from the standpoint of aestheticism, how should the aesthetic foundation of popular culture be established? What is the theoretical basis of the aestheticization of daily life?

Experience Aesthetics: The Cheerful Show of Body Comedy

In fact, with the development of cultural industry, the production economy has made the intellectual class increasingly subject to producers of capitalism and bureaucracy; the consumer economy has conflicted the intellectual class with popular culture; the left-wing intellectual class holds a democratic vision of opening up culture to all people, but this vision is contradictory to the comic exaggeration of which popular culture presented; the tendency of intellectual class advocating elitism and nobility is contradictory to the popularization of culture. In a deeper sense, artists and intellectuals feel the defects of modern society and the shock from the world that is moving towards chaos.

The modern variation of daily aesthetics has prompted the conscious adjustment of the cultural standpoint and theoretical horizon of classic aesthetics. Aesthetics has gradually broken through the narrow frame of “beauty for beauty’s”

sake in the past, and penetrated various living activities of human beings, to strengthen the power of aesthetic intervention in reality and elevate the spirit in the interpretation of contemporary human survival activities. There is no doubt that the relationship between aesthetics and human existence has become the internal basis of the aesthetic transformation in the new period; aesthetics changes the previous abstract speculation that starts from a certain fixed point to confirm the existence of beauty. Instead, it focuses on the living conditions of contemporary people in a unique way, asking the value of life and exploring the meaning of it. The transformation of the perspective of existentialism means that aesthetics participates in the construction of contemporary attitudes of existentialism in its possible way, and also uses its affectionate pursuit of ideals to erect the transcendental coordinates for human existence, to better shoulder the mission of “worrying” for humanity.

Classical aesthetics has gone through the three major stages of ontology, epistemology, and the theory of knowledge, starting from Gadamer to a new stage of the theory of the experience, which has laid a solid theoretical foundation for contemporary aesthetic transformation. Nietzsche once said: Beauty is the root of man. Therefore, aesthetics is based on the sharing of civilizations. The so-called “do not do what you don’t want to do to others” embodies experience ethics that think for others. However, the factors of the theory of experience do not represent the theory itself, neither the related components necessarily originate from it. Leaving aside distant classical tradition, the connotation and tendency of experience in the near modern age contrast each other enormously. For example, in the modernism art which Kafka represented, novelists turned man into a beetle, or a symbolic character K, making the audience experience a sharp heaviness and intelligence; while the famous Italian novelist Calvino makes people experience the flat lightness and sentimentality that uniquely belongs to the post-modernism. The rise of popular culture is supported by an unprecedented high-tech synthesis and modern communication technology, based on a new encoding-decoding cultural information theory, and formed on the theory of experience aesthetics as well as daily aesthetics, which are core ideas of the pan-aesthetics age. Popular culture’s new aesthetic point of view is the visual turn, and it takes high-quality, virtual image culture as its cultural form to eliminate “true” life with “true” technology; people use them to fight against the survival pressure, technological control and cultural hegemony in their real lives, and to achieve a new type of aesthetic liberation and meaning creation with a pan-cultural tendency. The popularity of leisure and fashion aesthetics has made the philosophy of happiness or jovial popular. It neither pursues a deep search for ideas nor seeks the development of spiritual space. Instead, it

points oneself to the individual's body, emphasizing the current pleasure experience and desire for release.

Mass culture is not as obsessed with concepts and ideas as classic art but is committed to creating a body fantasy, because its connotation needs to be a consumable thing, something that can imaginatively satisfy desires. While the human body is both an object of desire and a representative of emotional release; both a collection of social relations and a secular image of existence, therefore, in popular culture, cultural producers are committed to creating a variety of body fantasies. For instance, the storyline, world conditions, and aesthetic style in Hollywood movies may be quickly forgotten, but the movie stars' elegant demeanor enjoys the vivid eternity. Audrey Hepburn's charms, Marilyn Monroe's sex appeal, Ingrid Bergman's elegance, Vivien Li's beauty, etc. are all body fantasies that were intentionally created by Hollywood movies. They have now become metaphorical "signifiers" and symbols of people's dreams. The mass culture of post-modern society also particularly highlights the sexual characteristics of movie stars' body fantasies, for sexiness is the object of general human desire, and it is also the expression of physical characteristics. Contemporary mass culture often regards sexiness as the content of body fantasies, and sexy stars also fill the space of various media; as the focus of the lively physical comedy, sex has become the biggest commodity in the cultural market, and the dream of all consumers, for it is both the core of life's desire and the selling point of the cultural industry.

Of course, it is impossible for contemporary aesthetics, which has experienced the impact of postmodernism, to return to the classical era intact; experiential aesthetics, which are built on the philosophy of existentialism, can neither pander to the interests of the masses without principle nor cling to the existing traditions, it should show a new post-humanistic position, that is, calling for the return of the divinity while preserving aesthetic "earthly" results. The medieval divine monism is completely different from the current pursuit of divinity, the previous divine monism led to the enslavement and bondage of man—the supremacy of God and man's divine servitude, while the current pursuit of divinity is to elevate man's spirit after material enrichment, so that man is truly on the path of full development; humanism first rebelled against divinity and broke free from its bondage, focused on the earthly nature or secularity, but when the earthly nature went downhill remarkably, there was an urgent need to rebuild the humanistic spirit, call for its uplift, and promote it in post-humanistic context. The great decline of humanism caused by secularization and consumerism ended the honeymoon between popular culture and humanities and arts, and the tension between emotion and reason, content and form,

experience and thought loosened and even disappeared. Under such circumstances, the positive results of aesthetics utilization and popularization should be preserved, the sensation and recollection of spiritual pleasure should be restored in a variety of pleasurable experiences, and the “pursuit of divinity” that always asks about existential conditions by the modernism of which Kafka represented should be borrowed. Using spiritual divinity or transcendence to confront the falling material secularity and technological solidification, and feed this non-falling spirit into the popular mass culture again, while preserving its external beauty and diversity of interest, and striving to improve its ideology and artistic taste, so that mass culture enters the track of healthy development.

Popular culture witnesses the rapidly daily production of works, just like a new cloud expels clouds from the previous day. People blame mass culture for being a degenerate culture; it might be true, but popular culture has its repertoire. Besides, there is no less mediocrity in elegant culture than there is in popular culture in proportion. Moreover, university professors should not only see the bottom of the vulgar culture but neglect the top, which is the university campus culture. It is true that television programs popularize science culture and provide superficial explanations of literature, and in the case of scientific shows, there are indeed excellent scientists from various fields who participated in the production. The real problem is the consumption patterns of this culture. It is a culture that does not allow for introspection, not just because one show will repel the previous one and one cloud will replace another, but also because the show is watched at leisure in the way of consumption. People watch it while dining, and before going to bed. It is the same as listening to music as a background sound and going to a concert hall. As a result, popular culture offers fewer possibilities for reflection because of its lack of consumption patterns and structures. After all, the tragic syndrome of modern culture is a tragedy of reflection. Originally, knowledge is for thinking, discussion, and consideration, to be incorporated into the experience of life. Thinking is degenerating everywhere, and even in humanistic culture, the mill is idling; it is no longer possible to take material from scientific culture for thinking; communication has become very rare, even between philosophy and science. Because of the difficulty of acquiring specialized scientific knowledge, humanistic culture is no longer able to reflect on human knowledge in the world. And in a scientific culture, where knowledge accumulates in nameless databases and computers are used more and more frequently, there is also the possibility of depriving people of knowledge, raising fears of new ignorance in its accumulation. The mass culture that gives up its obsession with ideas and thoughts and focuses only on the creation of a physical

illusion will ultimately deprive human culture of its possibilities for introspection.

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