

On the Artistic Value of Belladonna of Sadness from the Perspective of “Haptic Visuality”

Pan YiTong

School of Theater, Film and Television, Communication University of China, Beijing 100024, China

Keywords: Haptic visuality, Belladonna of sadness, Skin of the image, Feminism

Abstract: “Haptic visuality” is a new way to study films that emerged in the theoretical circle of modern films in the 1980s, which shifts the focus of films from visuality to “haptic sense”, and proposes to appreciate the artistic value of films from the perspective of multi-sensory experience with images. In the animated film *Belladonna of Sadness* directed by Eiichi Yamamoto, “haptic visuality” occupies an extremely vital position in the display of its artistic value. This paper will try to appreciate and discuss the skin of the image composed of fluctuating lines, high-speed movement and psychedelic colors, the inner struggle of the characters under distortion and tearing, and the film body perceiving women’s oppression and resistance.

1. Introduction

In *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Laura U. Marks said: “The skin of the film provides a metaphor, which emphasizes the meaning of the film through its materiality and the contact between the perceiver and the object to be reproduced. Vision itself can also be haptic, as if we were touching a film with our eyes: I call it haptic visuality.”

In the animated film *Belladonna of Sadness*, the embodiment of “haptic visuality” is extremely obvious. Moreover, the skin of the image also mobilizes the audience’s various senses and brings them rich aesthetic experience. First of all, most of the scenes of the film are presented by watercolor painting, adopting coherent, smooth and fluctuating lines to outline the characters and bringing the audience strong haptic experience. For example, at the beginning of the film, the heroine Jenny slowly put her arms around her husband’s neck, while her husband put his arms around her waist from behind. This scene is shown with fluctuating lines. The action of fondling and touching on the body by the arm no longer stays in the audience’s vision, but is also transmitted to their bodies, making them feel as if their bodies were also being touched, stimulating their hearts with haptic sensations, and sending out “affect” and “desire”.

At the same time, the film reflects a strong pop art style. Coupled with high-speed moving images, the film makes good use of high-contrast and high-saturation colors, to create a psychedelic sense, making the audience seem to be in a tumultuous, noisy and bizarre world. Except for exerting an influence on the audience’s vision, the film also makes their auditory sensation and body perception feel obvious oppression and impact to a great extent. For example, in the film, after knowing that Jenny got the help of the devil, the lord’s wife ordered soldiers to catch her. Although

the heroine ran around, it was still difficult for her to escape. At that time, to create a repressive atmosphere, the scene adopts high contrast in black, blue and white. The picture, black shoes reflect the blue reflection on the white ground, uses high-contrast and high-saturation colors and the distribution structure of mirror image to present the power of pursuers' footsteps.

2. The Inner Struggle of the Character under Distortion and Tearing

In the animated film *Belladonna of Sadness*, the application of "haptic visuality" not only brings sensory stimulation to the audience, but also profoundly shows the inner world of the characters, which occupies a vital position in the shaping of characters and the audience's understanding and empathy of the characters.

The first way to achieve this effect is to create a sense of texture. Through delicate lines, the creator delineates Jenny's facial expression in detail. Every texture on Jenny's face is clearly visible in close-up shots and exquisite scenes. For example, when showing Jenny's kindness and innocence, the film sketches her eyes with delicate texture, allowing the audience to clearly see her clear eyes and slender eyelashes. When Jenny truly sympathized with the people, the tears that flowed from her eyes and the slight quiver of her eyelashes can be passed on to the audience's senses, making them feel as if they really felt in person.

Then, by virtue of the medium of "screen", the creator better presents Jenny's inner pain and burst of resistance and strength when she was raped. Julianna Bruno stressed that the medium itself is crucial to the transmission of the film. As far as characterization is concerned, the psychological, emotional and other internalized elements of characters can be displayed on the screen as if they were painted on cloth, which not only enable the audience to see with their eyes, but also enable them to touch and feel with their bodies.

In *Belladonna of Sadness*, there is no doubt that its screen surface has done this. When Jenny was raped, a piece of red and black cloth appeared on the screen, and Jenny was also a part of it. Then the cloth began to break and Jenny was torn in half. There were more and more red, and eventually it turned into one bat after another, filling the whole screen, while the cloth reflecting Jenny was cut again and again, and Jenny was torn in half again and again, turning into countless red bats.

This sort of treatment gives the audience material touch. With the cutting of the cloth and the fragmentation of the body, all senses are mobilized, resulting in a sense of physical tearing. Jenny's broken soul and inner despair and anger are clearly drawn on the cloth, the screen, giving the audience a strong sense of touch. When the audience actually touches the pain with their hands, and their bodies feel the tearing, they have a deeper understanding of Jenny's inner world.

3. Film Body Perceiving WOMEN's Oppresion and Resistance

Jennifer Buck reckoned that films have the body. Citing the trembling of the moving-arm microphone on the wall behind the stuttering boy in Andrei Tarkovsky's *The Mirror*, he argued that "the films body actively expresses its attention and shooting attitude as actors and audiences do." The trembling microphone in *The Mirror* is what makes the film feel the tension of the character, thus trembling like a human body. In the process of watching the film, the film, like the human body, can mobilize the muscles, joints, skin system and other senses, and truly touch and feel the stories and the emotions contained in the film.

Belladonna of Sadness is an animated film, taking feminism as its theme. Films with this theme are common. However, the theme of the film is particularly profound and striking. The audience could feel the pain of Jenny when she was oppressed, and the endless shock when she struggled,

resisted and countless Jennies appeared. This paper holds that the application of “haptic visuality” is undoubtedly the key to achieve this effect.

For example, at the end of the film, when Jenny was about to be executed as a witch by the Lord, people felt angry and sad, and the scene began to wobble violently. After a close-up shot of an individual’s facial expressions of anger, the scene quickly moved to everyone’s face, with a faster and more violent wobble, which is the expression of film body’s grief and indignation at the persecution of women. Although there is no voice, with the wobble of the scene, the audience seems to hear the deafening cry from the crowd, and even feel the anger and sadness generated from the heart. Jenny, who has been oppressed but has always been kind-hearted and constantly seeking resistance, finally becomes a victim of the patriarchal society. People are sad and indignant for her, and the film body also feels real pain, crying and protesting for her. Naturally, the audience also feels the pain. Their ears hear mournful cries, their hearts tremble violently, and their sympathy, anger and hope for women’s liberation are pushed to the extreme.

References

- [1] Yan Fangfang(2020). “Haptic visuality” a theoretical approach to re-recognize the film. *Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art*, vol. 135, no.3, pp: 113-120.
- [2] Chen Hui(2020). Image despotism and idol worship in the audio-visual era -- Marion s criticism on contemporary image myth. *Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art*, vol.135, no.3, pp: 104-112
- [3] Xhang Bin(2018). The promise of the “petal bridge” and the return of “Eisenstein” -- The theoretical logic of images in the digital screen era. *Contemporary Cinema*, vol.135, no.12, pp: 92-95.
- [4] Ju Wei(2019). Public comments on *Loving Vincent*. *Contemporary Cinema*, vol.136, no.4, pp: 170-173.
- [5] Sun Shaoyi(2012). Redefining film: image somatosensory experience and the ideological trend of film Phenomenology. *Journal of Shanghai University(Social Science Edition)*, vol.129, no.3, pp: 17-30.
- [6] Yu Yisha(2011). Is she an angel or a witch? -- On the characters and destinies of *Belladonna of Sadness*. *Episode of Drama Monthly*, vol.53, no.2, pp: 48-50.
- [7] Wang Lulu(2018). Research on the aesthetic value of experimental animation in the new century. *Animation Research*, vol.14, no.22, pp: 143-145.